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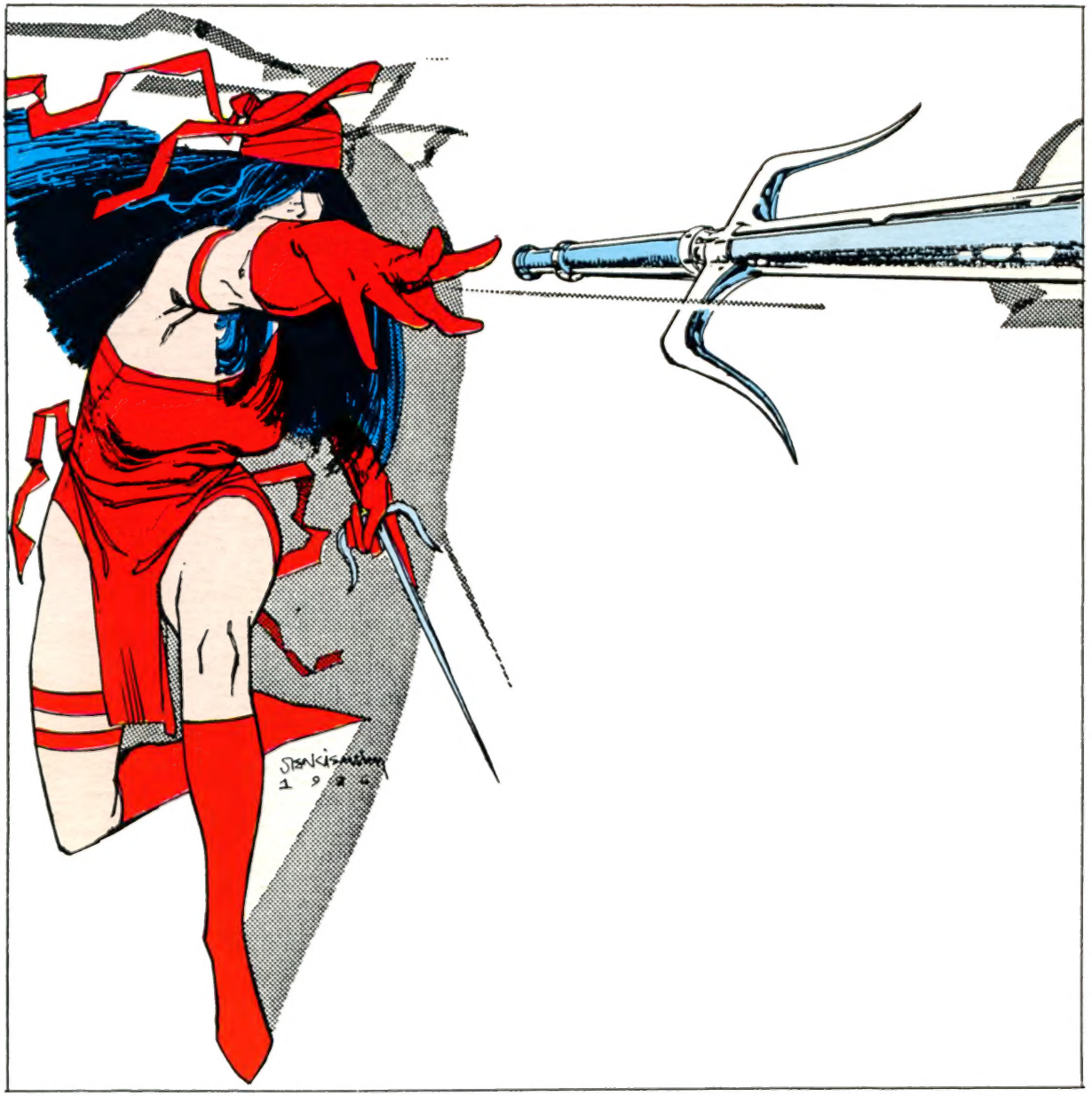
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COMICS INTERVIEW

#34

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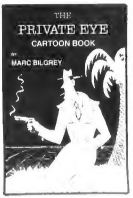
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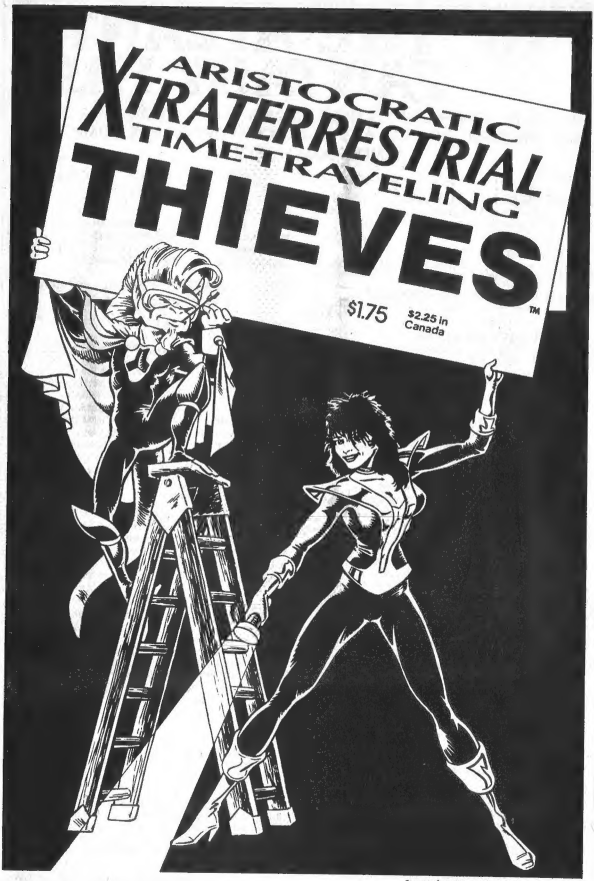
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art & colors



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UP FRONT

WHAT DOES A PUBLISHER DO? (Second in a series--collect 'em all!)

To publish is, of course, at root, to make public. To make information available to the public.

Sounds easy, doesn't it?

And it stands to reason that the first thing a publisher needs is something to publish. Like all great ideas, this can occur to the publisher in a blinding flash of brilliance ("That's it! I've got it! The public is crying out for a magazine called MONSTERS TO LAUGH WITH!"). Or a publisher can be open to ideas submitted by others ("What's that you say--? A new comic about a superhero death squad of Pediatric Mutant Assassins for Hire? Sure! Sounds great!").

Of course, once having committed to what seemed like a good idea at the time, the publisher will find himself breaking out in a cold sweat and sitting bolt upright in bed at odd hours of the night, wondering whether he made the right decision, after all.

No time now for second thoughts! In the heat of optimism, the publisher has already added the project to the schedule -- with an equally unrealistic deadline. From this point on, everyone scrambles frantically to meet the announced (and impossible) publication date. Of course, from the largest publisher to the smallest, they never do. But if those absurd dates weren't set, why, everything would be a lot later -- if anything got published at all, that is.

That's all you need to know about getting started. It's easy! It's fun! Next issue I'll go into other carefully-guarded secrets of publishing, such as how to deal with printers, creators, distributors, and their ilk. Until then--

Take care and stay aware!

-Dave

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"My biggest frustrations at DC were the

MARTY PASKO

I first met Marty Pasko about 15 years ago, when he was one of the most frequent contributors to the letters pages of Julius Schwartz-edited titles at DC Comics. Schwartz had nicknamed Marty "Pesky Pasko," because it seemed he was always finding faults. In truth, Marty revealed to me, he sent as many letters of praise as of criticism, but Julie liked to have characterization in his letter columns as well as his stories, so mostly Marty's critical missives saw print.

When Marty went pro, we somewhat lost touch with each other, to remake our acquaintance when I broke into freelance writing with a piece on film and comics in COMICS SCENE. By that time, he was not only writing comics but television as well, a career he still follows. In fact, that is his main occupation today, having quietly given up writing comics about two years ago. That quiet "retirement" became the beginnings of our conversations . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *What are you doing now?*

MARTY PASKO: In the last year, I've taken a writing partner, and she and I are doing television work, exclusively, including story editing a syndicated animated series. I have effectively left the comic-book field, as a result of an increasing number of commitments in other fields, and also a conscious decision, at least for the time being, to

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Marty Pasko

Born: 1954

Residence: Santa Monica, California

Education: One year short of a theater degree from Northwestern University

Credits: Writer for METAL MEN, SUPERMAN, E-MAN, STAR TREK, others. A number of scripts for television, both live-action and animation

Favorite Films: At the risk of sounding terribly prosaic — CITIZEN KANE and NETWORK, for very different reasons, are all-time favorites. The movie I liked the most this year was AFTER HOURS, with KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN a close second.

battles with people like Bridwell."



change direction. I don't really feel I have a great deal to offer the comic-book readership at this time, and what I see of the business, from my vantage point — which is to say that my perspective is colored a great deal by what I hear from close friends who are still involved in comics — reinforces that belief. I don't see that what interests me as a writer in that form is worth doing for someone of my age at this point in my life.

The only thing that would interest me is working in an anthology format. It's kind of ironic that the thing I would gravitate to naturally, if I had to do comic books today, would be stories for publication like HOUSE OF MYSTERY, which just don't exist anymore. I found, specifically, that I had evolved as a person, and as a writer, in a direction that made me disinterested in heroic fiction. And as you are well aware, the climate of the business is such that the only thing a publisher can sell in comics is heroic fiction — specifically superheroes.

PAT: *Are you still following comics at all? Is there anything you're still reading, or occasionally looking at, at least?*

MARTY: Yes and no — in the sense that there is this ever-increasing pile of comics accumulating in a corner of the office. It represents an intention which is rapidly becoming a self-delusion. . . .

PAT: *(Laughter.) . . . that someday you'll actually sit down and read all those things!*

MARTY: Exactly, exactly. There aren't enough hours in the day to get an optimum amount of work and maintain a stable relationship with my . . . life partner, shall we say?

There are things that look interesting, but the opportunity to give them anything more than a cursory glance just isn't there. **Alan Moore**'s writing on SWAMP THING, for example, is intriguing. . . .

PAT: *I was going to ask you about that, since you had written the series previously. . . .*

MARTY: Yes . . . Go ahead, ask the hard question, Pat.

PAT: *Okay — what do you think of Moore's work on SWAMP THING in comparison to your own?*

MARTY: I don't think there is any comparison. It's apples and oranges for a number of reasons. The most obvious, which would occur to anyone reading the two, is that he very quickly fought and won its removal from the Code. He was able to do that because of conditions that obtained when he began writing the book that did not obtain when I began with it. I specifically requested that removal from Day One, and the then-powers-that-be refused to consider it. In fact, the request, as I recall, just died with the editor.

There were a certain number of arbitrary constraints . . . Let me rephrase that: There were certain elements hand-

"Friends are going to turn on you."



Alec and Abby are reunited by Marty in SWAMP THING #17.

ed to me as a *fait accompi* — some of them having to do with my ability to produce material and the artist's ability to produce material. We were limited to 17 pages of story material, which had a dramatic effect on the scope, tone and direction of the stories. As well as the idea of having to satisfy the Code.

We were also — I don't want to say hobbled, because I don't want this to sound like an apologia for the work. I'm not a crybaby writer, and I don't want to say anything in print that would suggest that — but there was a concern about the SWAMP THING movie for which DC had very high expectations at the time: expectations that I did not share upon seeing the thing. There were certain considerations that I had in writing the material having to do with the fact that the book would not have been on the schedule had it not been for that film.

PAT: Were you, *let's say, requested to use certain characters, because they were in the film?*

MARTY: No, it wasn't so much a direct order as much as there were things that I wouldn't even have flirted with, ideas I would never have entertained, just because it was understood that certain elements were not negotiable, or malleable, or changeable. One of the things that I learned in doing SWAMP THING, by comparing it with what **Moore** did thereafter, was the mistake I had been making for a number of years. That is, accepting assignments that were offered to me on the basis of "Yeah, I can do something interesting within the context of that strip," rather than any passionate interest in the character itself.

I was more interested in Alec Holland inside the Swamp Thing. What **Moore** did with it would never have occurred to me. I don't see anything intrinsically interesting about the adventures of a walking plant — a literal walking plant. And the fact that it happens to be a walking plant with all of the sensibilities and intelligence of a human being is . . . It's a parlor trick to me. It's a little conceit, a flight of fancy, that does not, at least so far as the material I have read, hold any dimension of interest for someone like me. Obviously, it holds a great deal of appeal for the readership, but not for someone like me.

Which is also part of the whole reason I don't feel I have a hell of a lot to offer to today's readership. I seem to be out of touch with it. The alternative to what I'm doing — which is finding areas where my skills are better applied — is to become bitter and frustrated and broken down. Reviled by the younger talents in the industry as a hack, filled with a continual frustration that can lead to great emotional pressures, or substance abuse, or worse. And there are numerous, numerous instances in the business — and I don't need to name names: you know them. Some of them have gone on to other things; some of them have gone to their reward; some of them have gone to the backroom, where they continue to pound out stories that are published because there is an enormous volume of material to be produced each month.

PAT: *And somebody has to write it. . . .*

MARTY: Right. They work on the warm body theory. I never was interested in ending up that way. I met a lot of those people when I first started in the business, and I swore to myself that I would never end up like that. As the song lyric goes, "Knowing when to leave can be the hardest thing that anyone can learn," but you've got to learn it. You've got to know when it's time to move on. You also have to be a secure enough individual to be able to handle the fact that a lot of friends are going to turn on you, or misunderstand your motives. They're gong to say, "Oh well, he's gone Hollywood," or he's done this or done that.

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"I don't believe in professional heroes."

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"He is too good for us." "He's turned his back on the field that has treated him so well." "He's ungrateful," etc., etc. You have to be prepared to deal with that. You have to take the attitude that "For those who understand, no explanation is necessary; for those who don't understand, no explanation will suffice." Which is why I have been able to maintain very close, warm, satisfying friendships with a number of people in the comics business, and a number of other relationships that were like that at one time, no longer exist. And you just have to write that off as the fallout from making certain life decisions for yourself.

This is becoming, in effect, as I'm listening to myself speak, one of those public announcements of retirement. I don't mean it to be. I hope perhaps there might be a time — I don't when — when the climate of the business has changed so it would be possible for someone like me to work within the form, and be commercial enough to justify the amount of money the publishers pay me and, at the same time, derive some creative satisfaction from it. But, right now, that constellation of conditions doesn't exist, as far as I can tell.

I have never had any illusion about being an artist, and I've never been a self-conscious artist, in the sense that I sat down at the typewriter to write a comic book and said, "I am now going to create Art." I don't think art is arrived at that way.

PAT: *We agree.*

MARTY: *(Laughter.)* Okay. If anything, taking that attitude is a faster route to junk, to self-indulgent twaddle, than anything else.

PAT: *I know. Whenever anyone says to me that comic books, or television, whatever, is just commercial art, or commissioned work, at best, I like to point out to them that 75 percent or more of the great works of the Renaissance were produced in exactly that way.*

MARTY: Precisely. By the same token, I have trouble with the fashionable concept of good art and bad art. To me, something is either art or it isn't. And, as I say, it's not the product of a conscious effort. It is something that happens — art is what lasts: art is what endures: art is what has a universality that motivates people to preserve it.

PAT: *It almost boils down to Sturgeon's Law.*

MARTY: To some extent, yeah. But the point is that I also believe it is possible for any creative act to be art.

I don't know what the term artform means — because it seems to me the term is so widely misunderstood as to be almost meaningless now. Language is like a bubber band. It stretches, but past a certain point it breaks, or loses its elasticity, its effectiveness. Artform is one of those terms that is heading in that direction. Film is an artform — what that means is that, like any creative act, some films are examples of art. But THE MONSTER AND THE BEACH GIRL is a film — if film is an artform, does it necessarily follow that THE MONSTER AND THE BEACH GIRL is a work of art? No, it doesn't

So, I think a comic book, or a comic-book story, can be a work of art. But to say, as a lot of my erstwhile colleagues in the comic-book field would like to believe, that they are sitting down and producing art by virtue of the fact that the field they are working in is an "artform," is a massive self-delusion. In fact, they labor under a handicap by embracing it.

For me, at least, art has something to do with truth. Not objective truth, if there is such a thing; not the reality that the sky is blue, there's gravity underneath our feet — but what I think **Paddy Chayevsky** called "intangible, evanescent human truth." I don't believe



"I was more interested in Alec Holland *inside* the Swamp Thing. What Alan Moore did would never have occurred to me."



MEGATON #5

ON SALE IN JUNE!

"The American Dream is dead. Good riddance!"

in heroes — certainly not in heroes as they are defined in contemporary comic books. I don't believe in professional heroes. I don't see any examples in the world that I see — people who are dedicating their lives to heroism. Certainly not in the grand, melodramatic sense that is glorified in comics. **Mother Theresa**, perhaps, comes the closest to that, in terms of a totally selfless individual. But I don't know the woman. I don't share her life. I don't have enough information to make a judgement about the nobility of her mission.

PAT: *I'd say the closest thing we have, in the real world, to a comic-book hero, is the quintessential "good cop," that every city police force has their share of . . .*

MARTY: And he gets paid.

PAT: *Yes. What we're really talking about in terms of a superhero, as defined in comics, is professional altruism, on an active level. And you're right — I don't think that exists in the real world.*

MARTY: I think what is more heroic, as I use the term and as some people use the term — but not as comic books use the term — is survival. Having a way of life, a point of view, a morality, an ethical code, that is the product of your own experience and what life has taught you — and being true to it. Being concerned about others' rights, coexisting in the world without trammeling other people's rights, social responsibility, living and letting live — that, to me, is heroic behavior, because so goddamn few of us do it.

But that's not dramatically interesting to a comic-book audience. I think that kind of character can be made interesting, and can be interesting in a dramatic form. There are examples of that in motion pictures or in plays — that's one hell of an understatement, in fact.

PAT: *In a way, what you've said describes, for example, Jimmy Stewart's character in IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, on a certain level . . .*

MARTY: Except that I would qualify it by excluding the patina of platitudinous claptrap that **Frank Capra** is famous for — or, in my mind, notorious for.

PAT: *Point taken.*

MARTY: They say the American dream is dead and, in that case, I say good riddance to bad rubbish. I think we should all go through life with less wool over our eyes.

Anyway, one of the things that happened to me last year, aside from the fact that getting the project off the ground was more trouble than it was worth, was that I began to realize that the more we talked — DC and I — about this particular project, the less we understood each other. The more I talked about my intentions, the less, it seems, they were understood. It became clear to me that there was no way I would be paired with an artist who would be on the same wavelength. And that's not a blanket put-down of artists, by any stretch of the imagination. There are very few artists that I've encountered, in all my time in the business, who approach the work in the way that I like to approach it, who think on the conceptual or thematic level that I like to start with. You start with the theme, and then you find a way to dramatize it. Two of those artists, as examples that come to mind, are **Frank Miller** and **Walt Simonson** — two people that I've had wonderful, exciting, enriching conversations with. What those experiences demonstrated to me is artists who are capable of thinking on that level, and artists who are interested in approaching the work that way, tend to



Frank Miller — an artist capable of thematic thinking. Such artists, says Marty, "don't need someone like me."



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"Writers were at the mercy of the artists."

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also have the requisite set of skills to be good comic-book writers. They don't need someone like me.

It became clear to me, if I were going to go any further doing what I wanted to do, the only way to do it would be to control the entire work — and the only way to do that is by doing most of the work yourself. I don't have those skills. I have a good visual imagination, but I am a crude cartoonist, at best. I'm totally untrained in that area, and it would take the equivalent of my adult life thus far to develop those skills. There's no point to that. I've chosen the path I want.

The only alternative to that is what a lot of my erstwhile colleagues have done, to disastrous effect — that is, to turn the artist into a puppet. No self-respecting person who is worth collaborating with, who has a creative contribution to make, wants to be put in that position. In point of fact, I was starting in my scripts, where I wasn't even the editor of the project, to move in that direction. I was notorious, when I was active in the field, for very long shot descriptions. I would defend myself by saying I did that largely because I never knew who the artist was going to be, from one moment to the next, and I was being saddled with people who were barely able to draw figures that were more sophisticated than stick figures — much less have a sense of story-telling, basically composition, etc. I felt, out of a sense of desperation, to protect the integrity of the material on any level, that I would create blueprints. I was directing on paper. I became calcified, it became an element of my style — that overkill was being inflicted on artists who



A trio of covers of Marty's scripts.

didn't deserve to be treated that way. What I didn't understand at the time — and I think this is true of any creative business — the average professional is so non-confrontational that they are almost totally incapable of communicating to you that they are frustrated, or that they have a problem. I think they are so conditioned by the common response to conflict in the comic-book profession — which is "I'm going to take my jacks and go home".

PAT: *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: Well, I mean...

PAT: *I'm laughing in pure recognition of what you're talking about, Marty.*

MARTY: I think the average artist probably feels — and writers feel the same way about artists — that "If I complain at all, I'm going to lose this person," so a stormy marriage is better than no marriage at all, or than a divorce. This is double true for writers now, where the royalty factor makes the dependence on a commercial artist very clear to any self-aware writer.

There was a climate developing at the time I started distancing myself from comics where writers were effectively at the mercy of the creative whims of the artists. I really didn't want to be in the position where I was, for example, trying to do an anti-hero comic disguised as a superhero comic [leaving aside for the moment whether that's worth doing in the first place — that I didn't do it suggests that I ultimately decided it wasn't] and constantly fighting an uphill battle because the artist wants to draw dinosaurs. The kind of conversations I kept getting into, toward the end, were terribly demoralizing. "Can we do a story about dinosaurs — I want to draw dinosaurs."

"Sorry, Mr. Artist, dinosaurs have nothing to do with what we're trying to do here. Dinosaurs don't fit into the milieu of the stories, they're inappropriate to the tone..."

I'm harrumphing here. By recreating the moment in my mind, I've rendered myself inarticulate, because that was precisely my reaction at the time. My first thought was, "If you understood what we were doing, you wouldn't even ask that." Then the second response is "If you want to draw dinosaurs, go do a portfolio, but don't try to stick them in where they don't belong." Then finally, you just throw your hands up in resignation.

PAT: *Well, since you've been rendered all but inarticulate on that subject, let's pick up something else.*

MARTY: Yeah, move along...

PAT: *You first gained notoriety, if you will, in the mid-Sixties, as a frequent contributor to the letters columns in Julie Schwartz's books.*

MARTY: I don't want to age myself quite that much, Pat. Actually, it was closer to '69-'70, when that started. But anyway...

PAT: *Okay, late Sixties.*

MARTY: Splitting hairs.

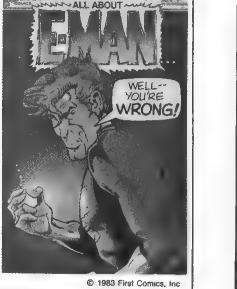
PAT: *Well, I don't know how much you've looked at letters columns lately, or heard about them, but...*

MARTY: My last real experience with them was writing them, when I was last working in comics.

PAT: Okay, *let's take it from there. I*



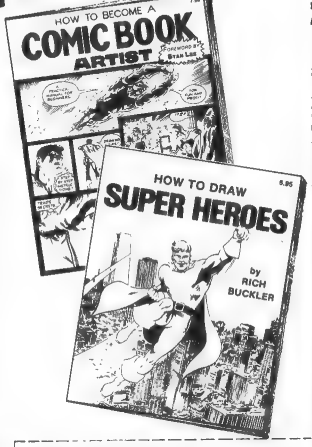
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"I did a spoof of Stephen Spielberg."

don't think they've changed over much in the last couple of years. Do you think letters columns serve the same purpose now that they did when you were contributing to them?

MARTY: Well, I'll confess to being an opportunist. I can't speak for anyone else, I know what purpose they served for me — and it was in direct response to a piece of advice from **Mike Friedrich.** I was trying to break into the business, and Mike suggested — wrongheadedly, I think, in retrospect; but at the age of 17 you don't know enough to quibble — that if you made your name known to editors, if there was an element of recognition to your name, you could lift yourself out of the slush pile.

Remember, this was in the days before there was the pressure to produce so much material that the publishers had to actively go out beating the bushes to find talent. These were the days when people like **Gardner Fox** and **John Broome** were still working, and had been writing comics for thirty or forty years, and were jealously protective of their little enclave. Literally, you had to struggle to break in with over-the-transom submissions.

To return to the point, Mike suggested that one of the ways to do this was to become a contributor to the letters columns. Write enough letters that your name became recognizable. This was a piece of advice specifically with regard to **Julie Schwartz**, who had a tendency, as I found out later as an editorial assistant to Julie, to open letters from certain people first — simply because they could be relied upon to be articulate and interesting and make lively contributions to the column. I'm sure there will be people reading this who, for some arcane reason, will get honked off about the idea that this happens. But let's not be disingenuous here — everybody does it. You have deadlines to meet, you have letters pages to fill. You go, in desperation when the column closes at the end of a business day and at three o'clock you haven't begun to write it, to a source, if there is one Julie was one of the first, and he taught a lot of other people to do that.

That was the course that was recommended, and I followed it. At the same time I was also sending over-the-transom submissions to other publishers, who were reading unsolicited manuscripts — DC at the time was not. It worked for me, obviously. That was my principal motivation: I don't think I would have done it otherwise. It got to be fun, certainly, but let's put it this way — had I not broken into comics I don't think I would have taken the path that others did of contributing to publications like THE COMICS JOURNAL, as a critic of comics.

I don't know what purpose letter columns serve. When I was an active reader, as a kid, in the early Sixties, they were comic-book clubs in print. In the mid-Sixties, fanzines were printed on mimeographs or hectographs — primitive things in comparison to what today's comics fan would call a fanzine — if that word is even used today.

PAT: *It still is, but I don't think it applies in the same way*

MARTY: If someone had thrust a copy of the JOURNAL as it is currently published into my hands when I was eight years old, I would have been amazed and astonished. I wouldn't have known what to make of it. Before the fanzines, that's what those letter columns served as — a place where you could meet other fans. Nowadays you'd never have that: you have computer bulletin boards where comic-book fans with personal computers communicate.

I have no idea what purpose letters columns serve now. I imagine they are poor relations to the kind of writing that people like **R. Fiore** do in the JOURNAL today. And for many people it's a first opportunity to see something they've written in print.

A lot of it is also an avenue to vent spleen. That stuff, at least when I was doing columns, didn't make it into print. Some of it is pretty bizarre — you get any group of professionals together who have done that stuff and they all have interesting stories about bizarre stuff that comes in the mail. Some of it, even with selective editing, you could publish and test whether the Comics Code has any parameters governing the text pages. That was a question that came up a lot back when I was doing letters columns — does the Code apply to the content of the letters pages? If so, to what extent? We used to get stuff in the mail that made **Kraft-Ebing** look like Jack and Jill! The question was always — how old are these people? Any comic that had male characters that were frequently shirtless, bare-chested, got a volume of very interesting mail. I don't know if those same people are still among the readership, but . . . *(Laughter.)* Let's go on . . . I don't want to be accused of being a homophobe.

PAT: *When you were doing METAL MEN with Walt Simonson, and later E-MAN, with Joe Staton, at First, you did a fair amount of satire. Some of it was very sharp and very pointed . . .*

MARTY: So, you're the one who thought so!

PAT: *Well, some poeple thought that*

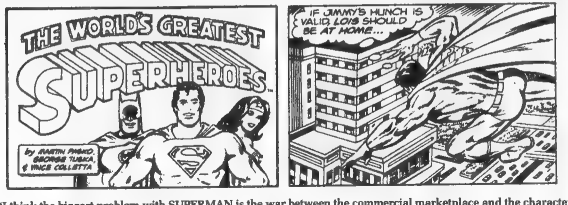
Is Gil Kane's rendition of Marty's Captain Kirk a bit different from the TV version, or is it just our imagination?



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MARTY PASKO

"*Spielberg was God.* Who could not like



"I think the biggest problem with SUPERMAN is the war between the commercial marketplace and the character mythology."

some of the E-MAN pieces pushed it beyond polite limits within the creative community.

MARTY: Yes.

PAT: *How do you feel about satire? Is satire something that goes over well in comics, or is it a lost cause?*

MARTY: I don't think you can do satire in comics. **Jonathan Swift** wrote satire; what we do is lampoonery.

It's a tricky proposition at best, because what you're doing is counting on a prior awareness by the readership of certain things in order to make the joke work. As any writer who does comedy successfully knows — and by that I mean anyone who has made an audience laugh at his writing; I count myself among them — if you explain it, you kill the joke. That's something most editors I've worked with in comics don't understand. They sit there fretting about whether their audience will get the joke. And my response has always been, "Well, you have to take the risk that they won't." If the mail is any reflection of the frames of reference of your readers — and I don't know that it is — then it was clear to me that I was misjudging, and in very peculiar ways, the sensibilities of my audience. By that I mean, the target audience I had imagined in my head probably didn't exist.

It was also interesting to learn that the readership is conditioned by where it reads. An example of this: I did a character who was sort of a spoof of **Stephen Spielberg**, although he was also intended to be a vehicle for making comments on the state of American film-making — the director as god who deifies the shot, the visual, at the expense of all else, up to and including the safety and the lives of his actors. As **Spielberg** goes specifically, there was a comment on him in the name of the character — Stringpole Schmaltzberg. We got a lot of comments in letters that said. "Oh, **Pasko** just thinks it's funny to use a funny-sounding name. That's MAD MAGAZINE stuff. We're older than that: we're more sophisticated."

None of those readers apparently understood what the Yiddish word schmaltz means. And none of them, it appears to me, understood the implications of that name, and the other things that were going on. At one point in the story, E-Man is imprisoned by the character, and the trap is designed so it looks like marionette strings. The comment being that, as a filmmaker, **Spielberg** is the biggest button-pusher of all time. He's soulless and manipulative. This, of course, was not grasped by the readers, most of whom — at least those who wrote — assumed that I couldn't possibly be questioning the idea that *Spielberg was God.* Who could not like E.T.? Who could not like CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND?

Me!

It became clear that the readership was so locked into certain sets of assumptions that their minds were not open to the possibility of the things I was trying to point out. Even lampoonery, if it's successful, is trying to point out that the emperor has no clothes. I thought I was in the position of either preaching to the converted or talking in Urdu. I hate to sound like I went at it with some sort of messianic fervor, that I thought I was on some sort of mission from God. My intention was merely to suggest a point of view that may not have occurred to the readership and amuse them and tickle them in the process. That was my minimum expectation — and I found I was not really able to do that.

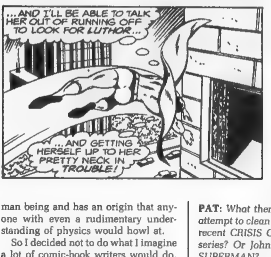
There were other problems as well, having to do with certain deficiencies on my part as a writer at the time. I think the most perceptive critical comment made about my work by anyone was that most of **Pasko**'s stories seem as if they mean to leap free of their context. It was my agreeing with that idea that made me re-examine whether comics was a medium for me to work in. You have to really care about these characters, certainly in today's climate, to be able to work with them successfully. You can't use them as devices

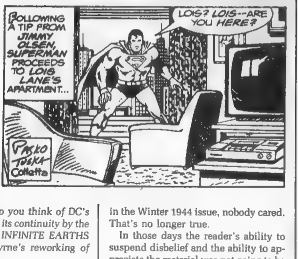
I was attracted to E-MAN in the first place not because I cared about those characters. The character was very literally a cartoon, and I mean that in the most derogatory sense — totally absurd, totally implausible. Perhaps I'm speaking from the vantage point of someone who knows about how that character was created, and how it got to be a humor feature.

The artist was handed scripts that he felt were totally preposterous, and felt he had no choice but to draw them with tongue in cheek. After a while, the original writer picked up on the fact that the artist wasn't taking it seriously and, with editorial urging besides, started to play into that. So all of this gentle, subtle humor that the fans of that strip deified — a lot of which, I suspect, is more of a nostalgic appeal than anything else — was actually inadvertant humor.

I was neither able, nor interested terribly much, in even attempting to treat those characters as real people. They were constructs; they were devices. And the whole thing I was trying to do with that strip was a kind of **Brechtian** distancing. That was the whole idea of having **Albert Einstein** be the narrator of the early issues — a device that didn't work at all and which I quickly abandoned. It was to remind the reader that he was just reading a comic book, that we were not trying to get the reader involved with the people, because there were no people to get involved with. They were cardboard cut-outs. The lead character isn't even a human being, for Christ's sake. He's energy in the form of a hu-

E.T. and CLOSE ENCOUNTERS? Me!''





man being and has an origin that anyone with even a rudimentary understanding of physics would howl at.

So I decided not to do what I imagine a lot of comic-book writers would do, given theft — which is try to go back and plug the holes, which is becoming increasingly more difficult, by the way, now that we defy continuity above all else. Never mind that a purple healing ray sounds stupid — godammit, if Steve Trevor was brought back to life by a purple healing ray in 1941, then in 1985, he's got to be brought back to life by a goddamn purple healing ray. And that's why WONDER WOMAN is being cancelled. That's an oversimplification — there are many other factors as well.

Concepts outlive their time, rather than being able to grow with them, if you slavishly follow continuity. One of my biggest frustrations working at DC were the ongoing battles I would fight, and frequently lose, with people like **Nelson Bridwell**. "Yes, Nelson, I understand it was so in 1942. I'm not trying to violate the continuity; I just want to omit the stupidities." But it got to the point where I and a number of other writers who were like-minded were not even able to make "errors" of omission. There was nothing you could do, except watch something be laughed into cancellation.

PAT: *What then do you think of DC's attempt to clean up its continuity by the recent CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS series? Or John Byrne's reworking of SUPERMAN?*

MARTY: That may be too little too late. There may be something to be said for the idea that the whole Superman concept is part of another age, and like Sherlock Holmes or Tarzan is inextricably now a part of camp in the popular imagination. It's part of the popular culture of a day gone by.

I think the biggest problem with Superman in particular is the war between the imperative to make a property commercial by the conditions of the marketplace in 1986 and the imperative to exploit the character and the mythology for big bucks in other media. I don't think you can do both successfully and keep the character consistent. In the '40s and the '50s, it was very simple. When **Robert Maxwell** invented kryptonite and defined Jimmy Olsen and embellished on the mythology as the producer and head writer of the SUPERMAN radio show, it was a simple matter for **Mort Weisinger** to just incorporate those improvisations in his comic, because if Jimmy Olsen was 12 years old and didn't have freckles and a bowtie in the Spring 1941 issue of SUPERMAN, and he did in the Winter 1944 issue, nobody cared. That's no longer true.

In those days the reader's ability to suspend disbelief and the ability to appreciate the material was not going to be threatened. That was how the character evolved. Somebody came up with a better idea? Fine. "This is the way it is because we say so." Nobody had to write a story explaining it. That was why there was never a problem when the movies or the TV medium redefined the character. Now, writers and directors exercising their own creative judgement to the best of their ability in interpreting the character and making it commercial on the movie screen, do what they need to do, and because a thousand times more money can be made from the movie than can be made from all of the SUPERMAN comic books put together, that decision is what prevails.

If anyone at DC were inclined to say, "No, no, Clark Kent can't work for the Daily Planet in your movie, because he is a TV newscaster," Warner Brothers is going to blink and say, "Who the fuck cares?" This creates a problem that in the comic-book marketplace erodes the credibility of the character. God only knows what's going to happen to Batman if that movie gets off the ground. Perhaps it's just really best to give up hope in exploiting the character in the





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"An author is fair game as satire."

comic-book marketplace. Ditto all these characters who are no longer comic-book characters but practically American icons.

PAT: *Licensable properties...*

MARTY: Right, and for that reason you should continue to publish the comic book.

I'm sure that, initially at least, whatever money DC's investing in **John Byrne** will pay off, because of what is called in television "sampling." People will pick up the book and look at it who wouldn't have been inclined to do so otherwise. Whether that will translate into something else, like an influx of more readers to DC — or, to put it another way, an increased market share for DC — remains to be seen. Beyond that, I wouldn't care to speculate because I don't consider myself too terribly knowledgeable on the state of the business right now. I'm just extrapolating from my understanding of it at the last time I really worked on it extensively. Maybe I fit into the category of somebody who isn't "entitled" to speak.

To answer your question, I guess I applaud the gutsiness, if that's what it is. Though I don't think killing off Supergirl is an act of courage so much as a public confession of gross embarrassment.

PAT: *(Laughter.) I understand.*

MARTY: It's a wonder they haven't also killed off Jimmy Olsen, Lucy Lane, and every other character from the comics who appeared in that dreadful movie. What do you expect from the man who directed BUG? Flying cockroaches on fire? Wonderful movie! Very few people remember that. Just so we all know who we're talking about here, it's **Jeannot Szwarc**.

PAT: *He just directed SANTA CLAUS — THE MOVIE, which has been getting some terrible reviews as well.*

MARTY: Really? Well, I'm waiting with breathless anticipation to see that steaming piece of celluloid, let me tell you!

Anyway, I don't understand a universe in which it is necessary to make that big a megillah out of changing things. I grew up in the tradition where you did it —

PAT: *You're not happy with the way things are? Fine, they aren't like that, anymore. Let's go ahead!*

MARTY: — because you operated under the assumption that the attrition rate among the readers was such that most of the kids reading you today weren't around six months ago, anyway — what difference does it make? That may or may not be true anymore. Who knows? Everybody you talk to has a different theory.

A year or two ago, DC's big theory was that the wave of the future was in the direct sales shops. That was the audience — there was no longer any distinction between the casual reader and the fan. They were one and the same: your entire audience was the fan market. Just a few months ago, I heard rumblings through my mutual friends that the current philosophy is that the wave of the future was to recapture a long-neglected audience — the newsstand buyer, the casual reader. Of course, that's going to be one hell of a parlor trick — comic books are, at least to me, incomprehensible to the casual reader. I am one, and if I try to start reading an issue that comes in the monthly bundle when I haven't read the previous four issues, I don't know what the hell is going on. It's not written in such a way as to make it accessible. The art — and it really is an art — of graceful exposition, done so deftly that you aren't aware that things are being explained to you, is virtually absent. It was almost as good as dead when I was working in the field. It was never one of my strong suits.

The F-MEN marshall forces to tackle the menace of — DARK ALBATROSS! It seems Marty's poke at a popular comic and its creators did little to endear him to Marvel.



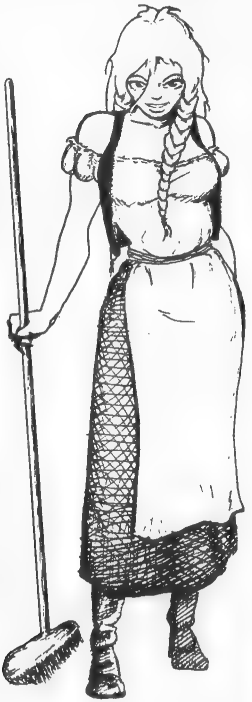
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"The average pro is Mr. Nonconfrontation."

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I apparently never got a good handle on how much recap was necessary in a continued story. I could never make up my mind if I wanted to pitch the story primarily to the reader who was picking up the book for the first time — so that he could follow it from then on — or if I wanted to take what I call "the private club approach" — "You don't know what's been going on for the last seven or eight issues — the hell with you!"

Listen, I talked around what you were fishing for before, in one of your earlier questions. You were talking about **Chris Claremont**, and I got the feeling there was something you wanted to know. Ask me a direct question and I'll be happy to answer it.

PAT: *Okay. Did you get flak from your friends in the industry about what you did with Chris, and John Byrne, and Jim Shooter in the X-MEN parody?*

MARTY: No, and for precisely the same reason you never hear from an artist that he's unhappy with your scripts. The average comic-book professional is Mr. Non-confrontation. If you call finding out about things from third parties "catching flak," well, then I caught flak.

The thing that always amazed me about that is that not one of the people whose nose was bent out of joint was enough of a mensch to pick up the phone — they had my number — and say, "Hey, I have some real problems with this. I'm pissed off." I hear from third parties that the people who imagine themselves wounded were saying things like "I thought Marty and I were friends." To which my response is — "Yeah, but evidently not close enough friends that you feel comfortable picking up the phone!"

This is quite common in this industry, also. Just because you shake hands with someone at a convention, or you sit on a panel with them once or twice, or you run into them at a cocktail party, you become their "friend." I'm sorry, I have a somewhat more specific definition of friend than that. But anyway, that's personalities . . .

PAT: *I know what you mean. When I was explaining to my wife who I was calling in setting up this interview, I got to a point where I realized "I don't know how to describe my relationship with Marty. Calling us friends, when we have not seen each other in person in four years or more, is a little stupid." But you're more than just a business acquaintance, because we do talk and have a good time together when we do it.*

MARTY: I know exactly what you're talking about. That's a very rational dificulty in putting a name to an unusual



The Super Family Circle, back before Supergirl was murdered by that master villain — editorial policy — and Marty scripted her.

circumstance, as opposed to an active presumption, which is what I think I was describing before.

Again I sound like I'm evading the question, but I was startled by the reaction to those two stories. There were people who weren't really taken off on in those stories who managed to look between the panels and find things to be offended by. In some quarters there was a great deal of rage and those people weren't even involved. There was a lot of silliness with people taking up causes on behalf of other people — people getting offended on behalf of other people. That's the kind of adolescent nonsense with which I have no patience.

I was disturbed; I was bothered; I was saddened — that's perhaps the best word — to hear that people inferred slights that were not even in my mind, much less on the page. Ultimately you have to be more concerned with whether you violate people's rights, than with whether you hurt their feelings. Sometimes people's feelings are hurt because of a set of mental processes that you may not feel are rational. You can't second-guess that. As long as one's conscience is clear; as long as one knows that he didn't set out to hurt anyone personally — that was not one's intention — one can sleep easily at night. And I've never had any problems sleeping as a result of that story.

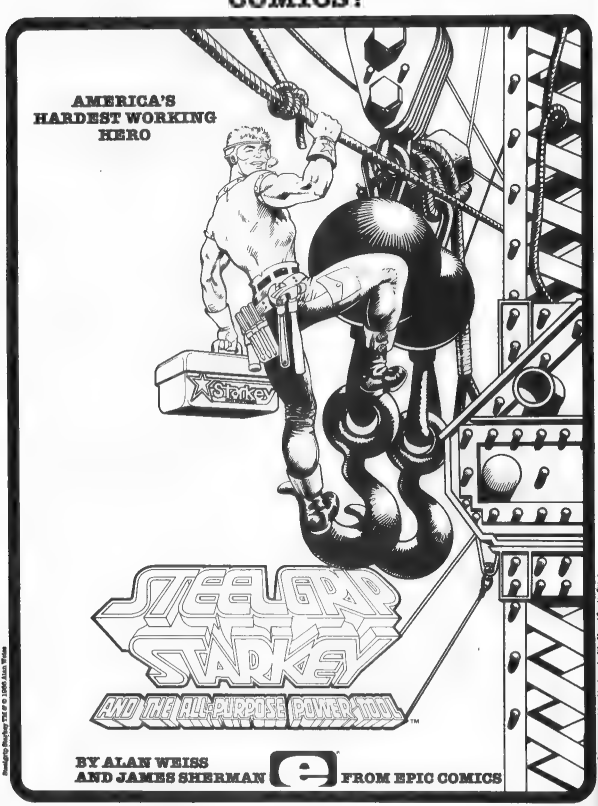
I think personifying an author or an artist as a satiric device is fair game. It has been done before — particularly if you could argue the case legally that those individuals are public figures. And in the specific case of **Chris Claremont**, a person who by all reports spends more time writing on planes going from one convention to another, than at a desk in his home — he's a public figure.

I don't know Chris. I know nothing about his private life, I know nothing about anything except what is on the page. What I was doing in that story was, through a fictional character, commenting on a sensibility that is evident in the work. I heard, third-hand, that certain people interpreted certain things in those stories as personal attacks — comments on aspects of their private lives that were not fair game for satire. That was why they were upset.

I feel a little silly, frankly, two years after the fact, if not three, commenting on all of this. Put this in the category of beating a dead horse.

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In part one, Al revealed his master plans for STEELGRIP STARKEY, Epic Comics' upcoming hardhat hero, along with his never before published pencils of a Jim Starlin WARLOCK script, and his Zen Working Philosophy. Here in part two, Al divulges the hilarious escapades of dragging Stan Lee to a KISS rock concert, and more!

DWIGHT: *What has been the most difficult problem you've had when working with a separate writer?*

AL: I haven't had any problems, even with guys that supposedly are problems. I've never worked with anyone over a long period of time and under a lot of pressure, but I've worked with **Wein**, **Thomas**, **Wolfman**, **Shooter**. We always get together and do plots in a sitdown situation. Most often it's because they have a particular plot in mind that my style might be good for, you know. **Englehart** and I used to have a great time working together. How about working with **Jim Starlin** on a story where we're both artists but we got together and he's gonna be the writer and I'm gonna be the artist and he says, "What do you want to draw?" I say, "What do you want to write?" Within two hours we've got a story that is totally original and it's a lot of fun. I much prefer to work that way than to just have a script handed to me — and that's how I would work with other artists on my strip, on STEELGRIP, where I would write it. I wouldn't want to just throw something at an artist that he wouldn't have fun with. You want the level of inspiration.

DWIGHT: *Artists always seem to be the first members of creative teams to leave*



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comics. Why is that, do you think?

ALAN: Because it's the hardest part of a comic. You can write a lot faster than you can draw. You live with these pages a long time when you're drawing them, and depending on how tight your pencils are, how much you're into the character, how much research you've done, how many issues you've done, you burn out. By the time I've drawn an issue or two of a character I feel as though I've done fifteen — never settling for just the stock shot or punch scene, always looking for a way to take what I remember as my favorite stuff and then go one better, hopefully two. You burn out.

DWIGHT: *Do you think that editors should be actively involved in a project or do you think they should have more of a hands-off attitude and just guide you?*

ALAN: Well, I think that would be dictated by whose character it is. I like the way Marvel works. They coordinate their editorial staff so that nobody's stepping on anybody else's toes, hopefully — but there are always delicate situations. Over at Epic they're using the minimum amount of pressure. It's more an editorial level of maintaining consistency. Just because you're an editor, and so to prove that you're earning your pay you go in there and change some stuff — that doesn't seem to happen.

DWIGHT: *So you figure that editors who are actually responsible for the company characters are more in a position where they're forced to be in an active role, they are like the custodians of the characters?*

ALAN: Sure. That doesn't lessen their responsibility to the artists in any way, because there's no reason why an editor can't work with the creative team. They usually do. If they don't, then that's another factor for why the artistic names change on the book — editorial differences. *(Laughter.)* Most of the time, they would rather keep a consistent team on the book. And there are so many other ways to make a book fresh, to take an old idea and create a new version of it. Just look how old characters can go through a renaissance, like Daredevil did, like Doc Strange goes through every once in awhile. Captain America fades in and out. Just when you think they could never come back, they do.

DWIGHT: *How have your feelings about comics changed over the years?*

ALAN: Well, if I keep the right distance then I can keep my preferable level of enthusiasm, which is very high — which is when you can grab the last six months of comics and throw 'em down on the floor and look at the covers and say, "There is still some crazy shit going down in these comical books." You can look at them and say, "What if I had never seen comics and I am looking at these particular ones right here?" Then you find the jobs that do it. In college, my teachers were trying to talk me out of doing commercial art of any kind, let alone *comic books!* "Oh, you're wasting your talent. Go into fine art." It didn't seem to make any sense to try to be more abstract than the next guy in order to end up in a museum where four people would look at a piece. If I'm going to take the time and the trouble to do this, then I'd like as many people as possible to see it. Now with Steelgrip I also have the feeling that this is a character that can go on for awhile and could even adapt to different media. I do kinda want to keep him out of the Marvel Universe, but Coyote makes a little appearance in one of the issues, because he's an Epic guy and **Englehart**'s my pal and it was logical. They fly over Vegas, so there he is. In the last few years you've had . . . short-lived series. Even though, by far, the majority of these projects have failed — at least they've come out. You had **Marshall Rogers** doing the FOOZLE thing. But we got to see 'em and it got to spur these guys on to do some other work. You got some crazies like **Bill Sienkiewicz**. Stretching, experimenting, taking chances. He and **Frank Miller** both like to keep changing and shocking. I started out more realistic than I'm drawing now. I want that feeling of animation, of exaggeration. It's an animation sort of an extension on reality, and it's rendered realistically, like **Wally Wood**'s approach to cartoons when he did "Black and Blue Hawks!" and "Superduperman!" in MAD; they were outrageous.

DWIGHT: *You're familiar with SHATTER? Do you think that this will remain an artistic novelty or that this whole idea of computerized art will become a widespread tool?*

ALAN: I don't really see it as taking

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"I really enjoyed drawing Pellucidar."

over, but I like to see any technical addition to our creative powers. It's still going to be an artist behind it. There's a guy drawing at the computer, but it took **Peter Gillis** to come up with that concept, and the concept was fully formed before any of the artwork was done. It was a lovely idea that didn't just settle for the novelty of the medium that it was using. He went the extra step to make sure that he had an original idea.

DWIGHT: *And now I'd like to ask you about "Pellucidar."*

ALAN: At the time I was sharing an apartment with **Wrightson** and **Kaluta**, and **Wrightson** was originally supposed to do that strip. When DC Comics got the rights to the **Burroughs** work, Berni wanted to do "Pellucidar." **Kaluta**, from the first, wanted to do "Carson of Venus," and they were already pretty sure they were going to have **Murphy Anderson** do "John Carter," 'cause he'd loved it forever. I'd bought the books because of the **Frazetta** covers but I hadn't read them, so when I heard that Berni was going to do "Pellucidar," I read the first two or three books. It was TARZAN with many, many fantasy elements, and I liked it. I used to hang around **Joe Orlando**'s office because we were doing work for the mystery books. Berni decided to do SWAMP THING and had to bow out of it — but they had **Gil Kane** in mind and I figured I could hang it up. But I was interested, so I said to Joe, "I hear **Gil Kane** might be doing Pellucidar." He says, "What do you want? What are you asking here?" It was just that if something should go wrong that *I* was interested in that strip. Well, I got a phone call, "What do you know about Pellucidar?" Well, fortunately, I'd read all of the books so I started naming Mahars and all of the stuff that **Burroughs** did. "Okay, bring me in a character sketch." So **Orlando** gave me the strip. Unfortunately, on the first issue we used a Pentel reproduction process. Joe wanted to keep the flavor of my layouts in the inks, so we did overlays with Pentel inking, and half of my artwork on that first story dropped out. Embarrassed the hell out of me. I worked like mad to do that second one to prove to everybody, "This is what it really looks like." I really enjoyed that work. I'm kind of sorry that we didn't get to continue with the strip. I would have loved to have done TARZAN AT THE EARTH'S CORE 'cause that's a rowdy story. But I'll be able to cover all of my leftover EARTH'S CORE oats on "Crackshot Scott," another idea of mine, which is a Western fantasy. The closest thing I could use to describe it is the serial RADIO RANCH with **Gene Autry**. That has science-fiction elements involved with cowboy stars involved with radio broadcasts from **Autry**'s ranch in the 1930s. Crackshot will be an attempt to put all of those elements together and I think it'll be swell when it finally comes out.



The character of Abner Perry in this Burroughs-esque drawing is really ERB artist Roy Krenkel (interviewed in CI #4).

DWIGHT: *At some point you moved from New York to California — in fact it wasn't just you, it was a group that...*

ALAN: Right. We were all about roughly contemporary. We had all reached a certain stage in our careers and we kind of felt like it was time to explore other possibilities besides DC and Marvel, see if the other coast and perhaps underground was a viable alternative. We decided almost unanimously that it wasn't because it was so small scale. At about that time they started doing what **Larry Todd** called ground-level comics, what we now call independent comics. **Mike Freidrich** with STAR*REACH was a real pioneer along those lines. I went out because I thought that if I wanted to continue in comics what I'd most like to do was make an original contribution of a character, maybe more than one — something that would stand on its own as far as originality and a new statement. I mentioned a couple of things that are just so right for what they're trying to do and what they're trying to be. THE ROCKETEER is a total piece of work. Anything **Craig Russell** does is a total piece of work. He can show you power and still show you grace and beauty. **Berni Wrightson** can show you the most horrible work in the world and yet you still have to chuckle, he's still got humor in there somewhere. **Mike Kaluta**'s work has subtlety that nobody else could approach, weirdnesses that you probably won't see until the tenth time that you look at the book.

DWIGHT: *Dealing with Mike Kaluta's work and also with yours, it must have been frustrating as all hell to be doing such fine-line work for a medium that has been known for the worst printing...*

"Very few of the graphic novels we get



ALAN: Not only that, but none of the editors wanted it. They said, "Make it look like **Kirby**." There was much more of a house-style attitude back then. Here were these crazies that wanted to do comics as illustration, as a result of the heavy inspiration we got from the ECs. Heavy shots! **Frazetta** illustrated three comic books in his life but you keep looking back at 'em because they're fantastic! Everything that **Williamson** did! All of that early **Woody** work! TWO-FISTED TALES — I would love to do TWO-FISTED. Carl's trying to come close to it with HIGH ADVENTURE. If you had a regular book with varying artists who could do any time period and go completely crazy . . . well, I'm going to be able to do that with DRASTIC ACTION with my character Scuff who's in a different comic strip every issue. And then there's the graphic novel WONDERWAR which is every World War II and war-comic *cliche* you've ever seen mixed up and jumbled up and changed into a way that you've never seen it.

DWIGHT: *Is it satire or is it straight story?*

ALAN: Well, gee, you know . . . it's both. In essence, it's World War II in Never-Never Land. *(Laughter.)* It's about a sailor, who is an animator in civilian life who's blown into a coma. His fantasy is a jumble of what's happening in the real world with his animation experience; mixed in with the natural archetypes in the children's astralplane — so there are heroes and villains. What I've done is I've taken all of the weapons and archetypes of World War II and the '40s, my parents' era, and made them cartoons, but they're the realistic **Wally Wood** kind of cartoons. They have the lighting and the shadows. The main character is a little sailor, kind of a **Jimmy Cagney** type, called Naval Nelson. The Flying Tigers are really flying tigers. The Vetoes are these rocketmen. The Zeroes are Japanese samurai flying men. Crab Calloway. Tommy Dorsal. Ethel Mermaid. It's that kind of nonsense that's going on in this guy's fantasy, but it's real to him — because if he loses that fantasy battle, he dies. The extra level comes in where we have an occultist reading his mind and projecting it onto a primitive television screen.

DWIGHT: *This is kind of tangential, but did you ever read Andrew J. Offutt's book ARDOR ON EROS?*

ALAN: No.

DWIGHT: *It's similar, in a sense, to what you're doing. This was more a takeoff on* Burroughs' *Mars books. This guy winds up, through a freakish accident, in a whole planet of his imagination. He comes to the realization that this world exists only because he imagines it, so he winds up at the end actually working to insure that everything stays real.*

ALAN: Makes sense. Basically, we do create our own fantasies. I'm doing it. I finally brought STEELGRIP down to that — a human being can pick up this comic book and get my thoughts that way without even talking to me. WONDERWAR comes from the same kind of concept that, I recently learned, they're teaching to kids to combat cancer: imagining the cancer as a villain or a beast with heroic images defeating it, knights or STAR WARS spaceships or shooting it with a magic squirtgun. I didn't even know that, when I first came up with this idea. What it means is that it's a jumble of the reality and his imaginings that take place all on one island which is symbolic of the last bit of consciousness that's left to this guy in the ocean of his unconscious. It's this little atoll shaped like a knot 'cause he's in bad shape. I call it Knott Atoll. *(Groan from Dwight.)* Hey, listen, it does have the other adult level. No matter what the silly names are, if he loses the war he dies. There's a nice cross-over about two-thirds of the way through. But I got to do my female Blackhawks, Ace Lacy and the Wildfire Flyers; each one a different nationality

are really graphic or really novels!"

and they have a different plane design. The bad guys are pirates, the Axeys which is my version of Nazis. All the good guys wear white gloves, like all good animation characters should, and all the bad guys wear black gloves. Captain Furor, the Axey leader, is a sort of **Charles Laughton**-type pirate. Half of the story will be drawn in cartoon style and what's happening in the naval hospital will be done in my usual realistic style, with the hillbilly occultist J. D. Black reading the guy's mind and having to convince the general not to unplug this kid 'cause he's fighting a very real war in his mind. The analogy is that we all have to win our internal battles before we can even consider any external battles. In essence, every hero is the archetypical hero, and then it just falls down to the different aspects and the different styles. We're always dealing with the same archetypes but what's important is how they're distilled through the individual personality. What I'm attempting here is to try to put a new wrinkle into it.

With Scuff, knowing that he's a professional sidekick, he also is the only one in the strip that is aware that he's a comic-strip character — his goal is to get out of the last page alive. One issue, it'll be CONAN; another issue will be DOCTOR STRANGE. I've created heroes to parallel all of these characters. The nice thing about this is that I can kill the hero any issue I feel like, and I will. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *It strikes me that you're deliberately challenging the preconceptions that the only real mainstay that can carry a title is the main character.*

ALAN: Oh, what a great thing to challenge — right? That's taking a chance. The way I feel about it is that, if I didn't have what I thought was an original idea, then I would be doing X-MEN right now. If you want to do mutants you can't do better than X-MEN. **Claremont** writes good mutants! If I just had another character that was just another version of the X-MEN — why bother? I really want to feel like when you pick up an old issue of CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN with **Kirby** drawing it and **Woody** inking it. It would be in four short chapters, but by the time you'd finished that book, you'd been everywhere. You felt like you'd read a novel, literally, much more so than many of the graphic novels that we get, very few of which I feel are really graphic or really novels. But then you get one by **Craig Russell** that shows you what a graphic novel ought to be, or you get one like **Starlin**'s book where he took an established character and did a significant enough story to be in that particular kind of package, THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN MARVEL. We're all doing comics because we loved them when we were kids. The point is, can we do something better now, that's an addition, instead of falling back, settling for less? I think that since we've got the opportunity, there are enough different stages and different packages, the novel, the limited series, monthly series, bimonthly, you name it — let's play with it. LOVE AND ROCKETS has nothing to do with superheroes. It's in a niche by itself. **Marshall Rogers**' FOOZLE thing is a crazy outside strip. DREADSTAR has more to it than is obvious at first. It looks very simple, but then you start to read it and realize that **Starlin** is doing his version of the heaviest questions that we all have to deal with. His favorite one is, you know, *death!* Look out, it's *death*, folks; here it comes: *Death!* Well, I'm not really going to do that with STEELGRIP for awhile, although the first time he sees



This page and opposite: Al's unpublished cover art for PETER PARKER, SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN.

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ALAN WEISS

"Stan Lee was hilarious at a Kiss concert."

a real death he's very affected by it. He doesn't just run on to the next adventure. He looks at it. He says it could be me. He almost quits because of it. He almost chickens out in the first issue because he's like you or me, the adventure looked attractive at first but then, "Wait a minute; there might be a whole lot more responsibility involved in this than I originally planned on. Am I up to it?" Not only that but, "Even if I am up to it, how does this spoil the original intent that I had when I took this gig on?"

DWIGHT: *The independents have pretty predominantly moved to California and Marvel and DC have stayed in New York. What is it about California that seems to attract . . .*

ALAN: The classic quote is when **Englehart** called Marvel and said, "I want to cut back on my work." They said, "What are you going to do with all of that extra time?" He looked at the sun splashing in on his drawing board and said, "I'll think of something." Well, I wouldn't have a problem with that, either. I'd prefer to live on the west coast or maybe even back in the desert, where I'm from. I don't like the weather in New York, but I do like New York. It's a living cartoon. It is surrealism at the peak. The top and the bottom are before your eyes all of the time, so it's non-stop inspiration. And to start up a character, it just seemed to me to make more sense to come back here. That's why **Starlin** came back. We drove across the country together and had many adventures on the way — recovering artwork that had been stolen by unscrupulous fanzine publishers, scaring them out of their wits on Hallowe'en because they never figured we'd show up in their very own hometown. *(Laughter.)* I'd like to be able to bounce, ultimately — to choose your New York weather to enjoy the city at its utmost and then get out to California and swim. Pisces gots to swim! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Okay, let me see what I got here. The KISS comic! We gotta talk about that. How did you get the KISS comic?*

ALAN: Well, that was **Steve Gerber**'s baby — or **Steve**-baby's **Gerber**. *(Laughter.)* **Mary Skrenes** was a writer at the time, she was with Steve, and she said she thought I would be perfect for the book. Steve was basically in charge. He had his own budget.

DWIGHT: *He was essentially starting up the SUPER SPECIAL line.*

ALAN: Which, in essence, is what became Epic Comics. Nothing ever turns out exactly how it was planned or when it was planned, to tell you the truth.

DWIGHT: *That was the real groundbreaking area.*

ALAN: Absolutely. He made them a deal they couldn't refuse. He said, "Look, here's the sales figures on their books, on their albums." **Kiss** was big. We went to several of their concerts. Steve and I worked together on the plot. He was a joy to work for and he had a budget, so rates were more than fair. And **Gene Simmons** is such a big comics fan . . . there were several occasions where we ended up just talking about comics, Steve and **Simmons** and I, for the rest of the night. We'd go up to his apartment and look at his "trophies". *(Laughter.)* . . . and him talking very candidly about his earliest experience in comics and how they'd inspired him to take on that persona in rock'n'roll.

Stan Lee and Al Weiss with original members of the rock group Kiss.



ALAN WEISS

"Stan Lee said, 'I suppose none of you notic-



The Spirit debates a subtle aesthetic point of the artist's eternal dilemma. Written and drawn by Al for Kitchen Sink's SPIRIT JAM — a tribute to Will Eisner.

It was hilarious, the time **Stan Lee** came to a **Kiss** concert. We flew up on the chartered plane. Ace, the guitarist, was getting loaded — **Gene Simmons** stayed straight, he just wants to talk: let's talk power; let's talk concepts; let's talk wimmin! *(Laughter.)* Stan's saying, "Well, you know, back then we put together Captain America and we did this thing and we were the first company to do heroes with problems . . ." They said, "Problems? Those guys got no problems! You wanta hear some problems . . ." *(Laughter.)* It was really quite a riff. Stan wasn't a big fan of the music, as you could readily imagine. It was so loud, and they had explosions going off all over the place, Stan couldn't differentiate one song from another. The audience got very rowdy — they were throwing firecrackers and cherry bombs and one went off under Stan's seat. We hardly noticed it because it was pretty noisy as it was and I was looking at how the individual characters moved so I could get what I call the kinetic aesthetic of each one — how they feel and how they move and how it all balances out. Stan came out afterwards and said, "I suppose none of you noticed that I was almost killed at this concert?" *(Laughter.)* He says, "I'm still deaf in one ear! I don't know that it means anything to you!" It was absolutely with tongue-in-cheek. As a matter of fact, that was my confirmation that Stan knew he was actively playing Stan — that there was a difference — and that he hadn't lost it, like people had said. He knew what he was playing and when it stopped and where it started and he had a good old time with it. It was a real nice trip to do.

DWIGHT: *Another special thing you were involved with was the SPIRIT JAM.*

ALAN: That was a fun project to work on, because that's one of my favorite strips of all time. If I can get the same flavor that the Spirit has through all of his run, with STEELGRIP or WONDER-WAR or DRASTIC ACTION COMICS, then I'll be a happy man. When that came around — the chance to do even a couple of pages — it was exciting. I gave it my all on those two pages, to get as much of how I felt about the Spirit in there — a certain amount of the **Lou Fine** kind of inking. I got to write the two pages, also. I knew I wanted to do a fight scene and when I decided I'd do it in a graveyard, I knew **Marshall Rogers** was doing the two pages previous to mine so we got together and made arrangements so that his last panel would work into my first panel. That didn't easily happen in parts of that jam, but we got it just right. I was real proud of those pages. I would like to do a whole SPIRIT story some time just for the hell of it.

I have to tell you, there were a couple of terrific synchronicities that happened connected with that SPIRIT JAM. I decided to put that story in the graveyard of the Trinity Church down at Wall Street. I have a grave stone marked Gerhart Schnobble, the main character from everybody's — including **Eisners** — favorite SPIRIT story. Marshall even put a poster in the background of one of the panels — NOW YOU WILL BELIEVE A MAN CAN FLY — and that we hadn't discussed previously. So I did this and I had the Gerhart Schnobble story and it was in the Trinity Church and I'm talking to **Cat Yronwode** who said, "You know, when **Will Eisner** was a kid he used to sell newspapers out in front of that church. There was an office building across the street, and then later on when he grew up he had a studio in that same building, overlooking that graveyard." That's a coincidence right there, but here's another layer — the Gerhart Schnobble story had photographs at the beginning and the end. On the first page he's over St. Patrick's Cathedral, and then at the last panel when he's fluttered down dead there was a photograph that was the background — it was taken out in the Harvey Comics issues because they thought nobody else would understand it — and evidently it was a little picture of **Eisner** peeking through a crowd. As I understand it, he was in his office on the eighth floor, I think, and saw a body go by the window, rushed downstairs, pushed his way through this crowd and just as he did a photographer took a shot and it was on the front page of the paper the next day. The Gerhart Schnobble story was based on that visual of seeing the body fly by the window. That's like three layers that I hooked into just by accident, by choosing that graveyard at that particular area. Beyond that

ed I was almost killed at this concert?"'

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I was honored just to be involved in that sucker. And the Ethiopia book also, HEROES FOR HOPE. Those kind of jam sessions are gonna be looked back on as real oddball classics, and being a real oddball, I'm only too pleased to do 'em.

DWIGHT: *You were also involved in DC's HEROES AGAIN HUNGER, weren't you?*

ALAN: I only got to ink one of **Jim Sherman**'s pages.

DWIGHT: *So we've pretty well exhausted a lot of. . .*

ALAN: Well, I'm pretty exhausted. *(Laughter.)* To tell you the truth, I'm charged up. I'd like to tell you the history of comics. *(Laughter.)* There was the first wave and it was in the '40s. Then there was a second wave and it was in the '50s. And then there was the third wave, and it was two guys. Now it's anybody who can lift a pencil!

DWIGHT: *It's certainly a crazy enough field. Oh, I almost forgot to get back to that unpublished WARLOCK story. What happens?*

ALAN: It would have been the last issue of the book — but the book ended two issues before **Starlin** expected that it would. It was literally one of those experiences where Jim and I sat down together and within two hours we had a plot together. I wanted to do something about gnomes and elves at the time, creatures of those proportions, so we created a whole planet of people who had been enslaved as miners by a kind of interplanetary corporate group represented by these guys that look like asparagus. Of the cute little miners, there were two main ones. One was a sort of magician because his house, his castle, was located at the only spot on the planet where the cloud cover wasn't complete, where you could actually see the stars, but living up in that rarified atmosphere drove the guy a little crazy. The other one was a cute gal named Whisper, who was the main connection to Warlock. Warlock has a confrontation at the beginning of the story and gets blasted down to this planet. For one page, when he wakes up, he's in total cartoon land. It's as if **Richard Corben** had drawn WARLOCK. I think it's a really delightful little story 'cause at the end the hero does something that heores just don't do. It's a nice little switch.

DWIGHT: *Maybe Al Milgrom should run this in FANFARE.*

ALAN: That's the idea, and why I don't want to reveal too much about it. He was possibly also going to take that SUBMARINER #1 that **Jim Shooter** and I worked on. There's also a SUBMARINER #2 and an AVENGERS story that we worked on that has Spider-Man and the Sub-Mariner and Quicksilver in it, with a new uniform that I designed for Quicksilver. That would have been a two-parter, so we've contemplated turning it into a graphic novel. It was my ultimate Sub-Mariner story. I got to do Sub-Mariner in 1938 in a barroom brawl, and later as **Fred Astaire** dancing on air to a swing band. Then the story swings up to now and ties in with certain elements of World War II.

DWIGHT: *What thing in comics do you hope to do that you haven't done yet?*

AL: I'd like a crack at a couple of characters that have always been favorites of mine. I'd like to do SHAZAM and Captain Marvel Jr. to sort of tip the hat to **Mac Raboy**. I'd like to do a couple of the **Lou Fine** characters like the Condor and the Ray. I'd like a crack at Superman and Batman. I'd like to try Hawkman. There are a bunch of guys at Marvel that I really haven't gotten full whack at. But what I'd like to do first and foremost would be to create one or more new characters that can stand alone like the Spirit does or like **Segar**'s Popeye does — something that can really latch onto the American unconscious spirit. Something that would become as much of a classic as Superman is. I don't even care if it's at that scale of success. Even if it's at the level of only knowledgeable comic-book heads. There are only so many guys who have heard of the Spirit, really — but those who do know it as a classic of the medium — one of a kind.

"I decided to do ELEKTRA in mixed

BILL SIENKIEWICZ

A funny thing happened on the way to the intro. Dwight Jon Zimmerman always rattles one off on tape either before doing an interview or afterwards. Well, this time he did it before, but he neglected to take the leader on his tape into account. All that survived of whatever it was he said is, "...ELEKTRA and the direction that his art has been taking."

Pretty darn intriguing, I grant you, but hardly what we'd call an introduction. But, hey, I'm not griping! This is my big chance to step out of my anonymity a little and say important things about one of comicdom's big names, Bill Sienkiewicz — which not only is unpronounceable but hard to type — to escape the drudgery of transcription for a moment, to maybe toss a razz at those guys who always conduct interviews in the nearest available wind tunnel.

But what can I say about Bill Sienkiewicz that he won't take exception to? I mean, the guy literally hates being talked about in terms of superficial classificaton. If I try to go in deep I'll most likely just antagonize him. So what can I say about him?

Creditwise, he did MOON KNIGHT and NEW MUTANTS and he is doing the Elektra limited series and the Daredevil graphic novel — but not the Elektra graphic novel. Is he a genius or a loon? Or both or neither? Does he sleep in the nude? Well, that last one you maybe won't get answered — unless you can somehow interpolate it from what follows... — Darrel Boatz

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *You're doing the Elektra mini-series in a different style from what you did in NEW MUTANTS. Why the change?*

BILL SIENKIEWICZ: *(Clears throat.)* Well, part of it is simply the medium I'm working in. I'm in color, and comics are mostly done in pen and ink, obviously. There are very few mainstream comics that are done in charcoal or anything else. When you get into color there are so many mediums: there's Dr. Martin's dyes, there's oil, there's acrylics, and there's also what I'm doing in ELEKTRA, — that is, working in cut paper...

DWIGHT: *Mixed medium?*

BILL: Yeah. Completely mixed mdeia. I decided to do ELEKTRA in color that way. Not blueline. Completely colored originals. Full color comics was a whole new field to me even though I had done the paintings before, like the JEDI covers and this paperback or that poster or whatever. I'd done paintings, primarily for myself, as well. When the opportunity came up to do a painted interior like the graphic novel that I'm doing with Frank the DAREDEVIL graphic novel — it sort of threw me into a sink-or-swim situation — basically I *put* myself there. I felt I would get better by working under pressure; so I basically set up some walls for myself to push against and see how I did against them. The first was really a tough one to get done, because I was so emotionally wrapped up with the story. I walked around the city for hours at a time going, "My God, what'd I get myself into?" One hundred, two hundred paintings an issue? I like strong, singular

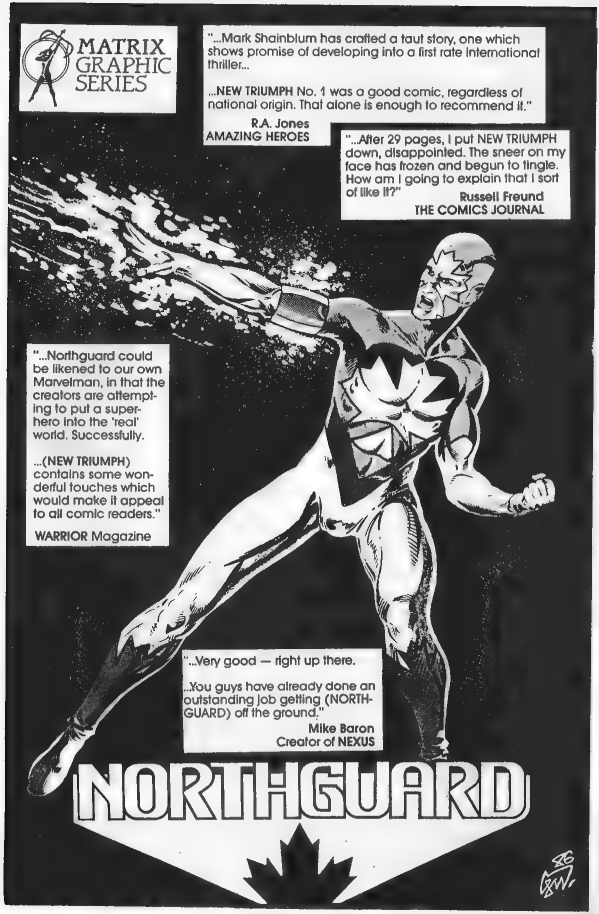
VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bill Sienkewicz
Born: 3 May 1958 — Blakely, PA
Most Often Asked Convention Question: How do you pronounce your name?
Answer: "Bill"
Most Often Asked Convention Request: Please pronounce last name.
Strongest Comic-Book Memory: When I stopped reading DCs because I saw an issue of FANTASTIC FOUR starring the Inhumans by Jack Kirby. There was something so different that just grabbed me by the throat.
Favorite Clothes Designer: Girbaud

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media...cut paper...original paintings."




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THE COMICS JOURNAL
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Mike Baron
Creator of NEXUS
NORTHGUARD

"When to shout and when to whisper."

images to get an idea across, and to break it up into panels was difficult. That ripped me in different directions — and I felt I couldn't give everything to the one single image that I wanted to. So I walked around the city for hours at a time, looking at things, taking photos, and just absorbing as much as I could, sort of gearing myself up to go to the studio — when I had the







studio in Manhattan next door to **Walt Simonson**. **Denys Cowan** was sharing a studio with me at the time and I can recall what it was like for the two of us. I mean, at that time, Denys was really busting his ass getting seriously into his work, trying to grasp certain abstract ideas about drawing and inking. Growing pains. Painful stuff. Rewarding stuff. Stuff that just improved his work incredibly. I mean, Denys always had tremendous ability, and was struggling like hell to apply it. And doing it. And so here's Denys going through all his tough shit and I come in like a disenfranchised loony toon and we'd kick in some **Robert Plant** tapes or **Doors** tapes and just attack the pages. I'd come in, it was late in the afternoon, and sit down and for three hours, four hours, to work, and it was as if I had been through a trial by fire, and I'd shake myself off and go home. That's how I worked on this color stuff. The floodgates would open and I would give birth to this finished page. It took all day to gear up to it, and I'd explode and scream and it would be done. And basically, to answer your question, color stuff really came about simply because there's a completely different psychology to color. It's simply more than just getting the fleshtones right. It has an impact, a psychological impact; so I basically went in and I wanted to do everything — I mean everything. I was so insecure about it all — I wanted to prove that I could do it.

DWIGHT: *Prove it to yourself?*

BILL: Yeah, to myself, that I could do it. And part of what art is is the essence, the quintessential essence, distillation; it's knowing as much what to leave out as what to put in. Well, I tried to figure out one way to do certain things, "Okay, I want to do it *this* way," and I'd vacillate and I'd want to do it this other way — and so I found out the way to do it was to do it all different ways but have each way that I did it have a definite reason for *being* that way. Rather than getting angry at myself and saying "What's wrong with me that I can't make up my mind?" Looking at it in the sense that the glass is half full as opposed to half empty. That it's a *plus* that I work in so many ways. Versatility.

DWIGHT: *Let me see if I understand you here. You're saying that you have all of these different ways of expressing yourself in color that you were fighting to figure out, so that you were almost fitting each different style to a different scene; like saying a bathroom scene would work with the colored paper while the park scene would work well in pastel chalk.*

BILL: Right.

DWIGHT: *Following on that — did you find yourself looking at what other illustrators in comics were doing, like for instance John Jay Muth in MOONSHADOW, to kind of get a hint at how styles you were doing might reproduce?*







BILL: Well, in a way. I mean, I was looking at Jay's stuff, but that's so singularly MOONSHADOW. Jay's style is very lyrical, and I think that there may have been

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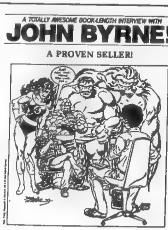
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"My God, what did I get myself into?"

some aspects of what Jay was doing that I liked, that I might want to incorporate, but it was basically a completely different temperature. It was more frenetic. I felt like if you had a dial with a needle on it it would just be jumping back and forth like a nuclear tennis match. It was trying to finally figure out how to do things. I went from being in control, with black-and-white work, to putting myself into the fire from the frying pan. It was straddling two Brahma bulls, basically, with a paintbrush in my mouth, saying, "Okay now, ride!" I didn't want to throw myself into a high pressure situation and petrify myself into non-productivity — which I think is what it started out as — but just to gain mastery and control of the medium.

DWIGHT: *How do you compare the stories that you're doing now to that first one? Have you achieved that control?*

BILL: Yes and no. I've achieved a little bit more control. I'm much more sure of myself in terms of what color can do. I also really feel that the first one was definitely *a la prima*, of the moment. It couldn't have been done any other way. Frank and I were discussing the possibility of doing ELEKTRA as sort of a project to work on to bring in a little bit of bread-and-butter money while I was working on the graphic novel, which was taking up all of my time. I'm just finishing it up and it's taken me about a year to do it.

DWIGHT: *This is the DAREDEVIL graphic novel?*

BILL: The DAREDEVIL graphic novel. I also had to learn to earn a living in that time, and basically I started to find out that when Frank and I get together, that neither of us does anything half-assed; and so these sparks were shooting across the 3,000 miles of phone lines — after he moved — of incredible intensity. ELEKTRA was a product of that, and I think it's a really strong piece of work for both of us. The issues that we're working on now are not at all what we thought they would be — they've taken on their own life. ELEKTRA is probably the most organic series I think I've worked on. Nothing I've ever worked on comes close. I still feel like there's so many possibilities and avenues to go up. The hardest thing to do when you realize you have so many options is to pick one and do it. What eventually happens with me, anyway, is that I don't feel the plus of picking that one way to do it. I feel the loss of having left the other ones behind, so I'll have to do *those* next time. It becomes a furnace — I just want to keep going in and doing stuff; like I'll do the next page *this* way — and so what was once fear is now excitement. "This page is done, I'm gonna get to the next one!" And the stories we're doing reflect that. It's turned from pretty psychological heavy-duty stuff into some pretty rip-roaring kick-ass high adventure.



"ELEKTRA's turned from pretty psychological heavy-duty stuff into rip-roaring high adventure."

DWIGHT: *Since you're using all of these different meduims of color, isn't there a kind of fear that the overall impression's going to be more chaotic, like there'll be less of a unity?*

BILL: That's something that I think was actually desirable in the first issue. That's a lot of what the first issue is like. The second issue doesn't have that. The third issue has a different quality — it's a little more eclectic but in a different way. I think the adrenaline surge after the first two issues sort of settled in. And also that was when I was doing the bulk of the graphic novel, so I was working on ELEKTRA a little more sporadically. And the fourth issue is starting to shape up as a unit again, 'cause I'm done with the graphic novel.

DWIGHT: *Since ELEKTRA is being done through Epic, what difference have you noticed in being able to tell the story?*

BILL: *(Pause.)* I was going to say anything goes, and it is anything goes within what I consider to be reason. I think in a way it's a perfect vehicle. NEW MUTANTS was probably *not* the vehicle to go any further with that kind of experimentation. ELEKTRA seems to be. But what oddly enough is happening is, the first one was very off-the-wall, the second one was a little less so. What's happening is that the story is taking strong priority — where we're not trying to do crazy, wacky things just for their own sake. We're trying to really do things that will service the story and the characterization. If I feel like going off the deep end in terms of technique and the like, that's fine; but I feel, ultimately, there has to be a ballpark, or a game that's being played, in order for you to hit a home run. So when I do that kind of stuff I feel there

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"Elektra's not like Mary Tyler Moore."



has to be a reason for it. That's a sign of a bit more maturity on my part. I'm getting things under control, knowing when to shout and when to whisper, when to hit the airbrush and when to go and use line. The first issue of ELEKTRA, as much as I thrashed around, was like learning to jet-ski and falling down a lot. After awhile I didn't mind falling, because it was only water that I was hitting at umpteen many miles an hour *(laughter)*, and I started to not mind falling down so much 'cause I realized that in the act of falling I was learning balance. Keeping that attitude is really the thing that's helped me the most with the project. It's also helped my jet-skiing.

DWIGHT: *On ELEKTRA, how much of it is Frank Miller's vision and how much of it is yours?*

BILL: Well, Frank definitely -- I mean, it was his character, basically, so he has a definite idea of where he wants to go. What I'm bringing to it, are strong conceptual visuals to bounce off Frank. We'll have plot conferences and certain things that I'll do in the visuals will spark an idea. The one character that I did, named Perry, achieved a more prominent role in the book because of the way that he was drawn. He didn't become just a minor character. It's a game of mumblety-peg where I respond to Frank's words and throw back bizarre artwork at him, different reactions that I have, things that I want to show, for example: The reconstruction scene of Garrett in issue#3, taking S.H.I.E.L.D. and turning it into an arcane, industrialized, bureaucratic machine that doesn't work. Basically, Garrett has been blown up and he's being reconstructed at S.H.I.E.L.D. They're sewing him back together, literally, with a giant sewing machine, and they've got him standing up in this weird position, and he's partly wearing his clothes, and they've got drill bits going into him and everything. It's not at all comfortable. I think it's partly influenced be my real liking for **David Lynch**'s ERASERHEAD and anything that gutsy. Having those kinds of things done with the art and then Frank goes back in and says, "Let's try this . . ." -- and so we bounce back and forth.

DWIGHT: *Initially, were you afraid, since Elektra was Frank's creation and he is also an artist, that he might somehow restrict you?*

BILL: *(Pause.)* One of the things that I've done, to some people's chagrin or whatever, is that there's a certain cockiness that I have . . . when I come onto a book I try to make it fun for me, make it interesting for me to do. When I took on NEW MUTANTS I really hadn't followed what **Bob McLeod** or Sal Buscema had done, had no great desire or demand to do it that way. And so when I took on ELEKTRA I thought, "Okay, what's Elektra to me?" I mean, Frank's going to take care of that aspect partly in the writing, but basically I had to make ELEKTRA work visually for me, and I struggled with it because I partly took what Frank had done and tried to make it work for me. The mutants, as well, I felt that they were not visually unique. They were widgets. They all looked the same to me. And so I just moved them apart and tried to make them unique -- each with their own distinctive appearance. With Elektra I thought of making her almost unattractive, like a Greek sculpture which was very idealized for the time it was done but by today's standards is not soft at all. I thought of giving her a **George Washington** kind of nose, the Romanesque nose. But, it came down to the fact that this is a book that's about a lot of unattractive people -- let's just see what Elektra looks like as a really beautiful enigma. Let's give her a little bit of unique beauty, because in some panels she's very attractive and in other panels I think she's not.



DWIGHT: *Will her visual depiction change during the course of the series?*

BILL: It has already. She's more of a barometer of what the other characters are doing. She's very much active, but it's not like THE MARY TYLER MOORE SHOW where **Mary Tyler Moore** was sort of like the recipient of all of the bonzo-gonzo stuff going on around her. Elektra very much has a hand in it.

DWIGHT: *She distances herself?*

BILL: She stays pretty consistent for each issue, but there is a growth from issue to issue in her visual. I think that one thing about the four issues that I've worked on so far -- I can't speak for the next four -- what makes this project so intriguing is that from one issue to the next I'm learning so





"ELEKTRA is really a punk book. New

much, and my art has taken so many jumps in knowledge that it's like, "Where did that come from?" So it definitely is jumping all over the place — but yet in some weird way it's all making perfect sense. I couldn't have tried to have that work out that way, it just seems to be falling together that way.

DWIGHT: *With Frank Miller and Chris Claremont you've now worked with two people who have perhaps made the most impact on comics in recent memory, at least from the creative standpoint. How do you compare working with them?*

BILL: *(Pause.) I. . .*

WAITER: Can I get either of you a beer or something?

BILL: I'll have a little more lemon. I think you'll have more coffee?

DWIGHT: *Yeah.*

WAITER: Okay.

BILL: Let's see: how can I compare working with both of them? First, I want to say working with both of them was and is terrific. Working with Chris on NEW MUTANTS . . .I'd been doing a group book, basically, in MOON KNIGHT; but it was such a dark, moody book that I wanted to do something a little lighter — and so I came on the mutants and at first it started out fairly grim, and then later on it really turned into a punk book — and ELEKTRA is very much a new wave book. It's really a punk book. It's counterculture. Editorial. Very political.

Chris's writing is very much about emotions and rites of passage. Chris writes about people's emotions and how they talk about their feelings; whereas Frank can do characters, write dialog, extremely well — but he also is making a comment politically with his work. Frank's work has a point. A premise. And also I think ELEKTRA is a lot more of a comment, perhaps, on Frank's and my state of mind regarding the business world with the "cant's" and the "cannots" and the "have-tos" and the "shoulds" and the bureaucratic gobbledygook. There's a subversive quality to what we're doing.

DWIGHT: *So Frank is dealing with themes and using the people in the story as expressions of those themes?*

BILL: Yeah. I think that both of us are together on that point. We didn't really set out to do that. It just sort of happened. And I think what Chris does is very much soap opera, where the more things change, the more they stay the same. People eat that stuff up! I think he deals also with themes and issues but his *forte* is emotions — and people emoting about emoting — so that sometimes it feels . . .distant somehow — but it works — especially the Mutants — those traumas of the first date, of a zit on the end of your nose, those kind of things. Also here are kids that have those kinds of feelings and yet they're gifted and. . .it's. . .

DWIGHT: *They're special but they're just like you.*

BILL: Yeah, but because they have a power it's like they have to save the universe, but they miss the prom. There are things that Chris has written that are some of the most poignant stuff I've ever read. Chris, when he's really on I feel like — I don't know what this is gonna sound like — but Chris really works up to, works at the level of his art, of the art he gets. That's an observation. And I feel that when I really have been "on" and I've given him something that I've been very happy with — inspired by what he's given me — what he comes back with is so powerful. Like the bear issues. And I feel that I'm working that way with Frank now. So, I have to say that working with, really, two top talents, it's like anything else — it's an interaction — a collaboration so the more *I* give the more *I* get, and the more the project ultimately gets as well. It's really nice to feel that kind of strength and comradery and to bounce things back and forth that way.

DWIGHT: *Jim Steranko was a writer-artist. Walt Simonson and Frank Miller are writer-artists. Will we soon be seeing dual credit under Bill Sienkiewicz's name?*

BILL: Yes. The "Slow Dancer" job that I did for EPIC was sort of the first story that I had written professionally. Part of my trepidation about getting started is that I partly feel that I am not, as much as I've made my mark doing superhero stuff, I don't feel that that's the kind of stuff I really want to write — and there's been this "yeah-but" going on inside my head. "Well, I want to do this but it's not superheroes." I actually really love Orwellian kind of heavy industrialized images. And I like oppression themes in stories and. . .

WAITER: Here you go!

DWIGHT: *Thank you.*

BILL: . . .the things that are sort of obtuse. It's not so much what the story's doing, like literally in terms of a linear "a-b-c-d and these are the characters." It's what is being implied in the vehicle of the artwork and in the story. It's the nightmare, to a certain extent, and you look at it and you realize that there's something going on here, and it's almost like the parts sort of pull the whole sum of it into another world. It's a political cartoon where you have im-



wave. It's counterculture. Very political."



ages that represent something else. Like in ERASERHEAD, I think the baby, that kind of turtlesque thing wrapped in a sack, is a phallic symbol — and I think a lot of the stuff that **Lynch** does deal with the very anxiety provoking things, like meeting your girlfriend's family — real life flesh-and-blood things that are suppose to be the norm, and he imbues them with idiosynchartic subtext, and so turns that scene into the emotional equivalent of what we really feel. The unease, etc. **Woody Allen** would have hit you over the head with it in another way. **Lynch** just lets you sweat it out. A lot of directors are into quick cutting, and are into maybe holding onto a scene a second longer. What **David Lynch** did in ERASERHEAD was to break down that barrier — he did it with sound and he did it wth timing — and he just destroyed that comfort zone. That is what I really strongly admire, and that is what I feel is the art of it, and that's the kind of feeling I'd like to get across in my work — is that there is something, a subtext that's going on that's more than the linear. ERASERHEAD does that admirably. My girlfriend was watching it the other night and she got visibly upset and said, "This is weird. This is absolutely weird." I said, "Do you want to stop watching it?" and she said, "Absolutely not!" What I find really interesting about it is the repulsion-attraction force is so powerful in that film — and that's partly what I really want to work on with my story and art. I tend to be a very obsessive person, compulsive-obsessive, and I think my work is going to reflect that. When I do more of this I feel that I'm really going to be just jumping into it with both feet.

DWIGHT: *I'm getting the impression that you think highly of ERASERHEAD.* (Laughter.)

BILL: Oh yeah, I love it. I also love **Chuck Jones** and **Tex Avery**.

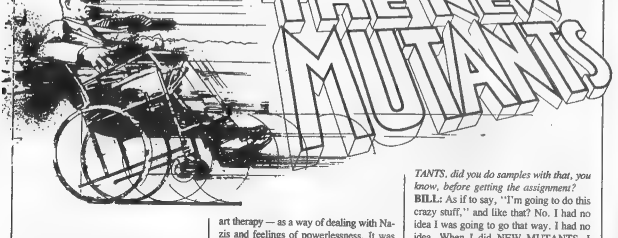
DWIGHT: *You need the counterpoint?*

BILL: Yeah, sure — the yin and the yang.

DWIGHT: *For awhile there you were known as the artist who could virtually out-Adams Neal Adams — in MOON KNIGHT, for instance — and then you surprised and shocked a lot of people with the new style that you brought to NEW MUTANTS. What was the style's genesis?*

BILL: Partly it was a good mixture of frus-

"No — I had no idea I was going to do



tration over feeling unseen by the critics and an innate desire to grow. I felt very dismissed. I felt that they were not looking at what was inherently mine. If you look at all of the **Neal Adams** "clones" that there have been, I got the most *shit* for it all because I did it better than anybody else.

DWIGHT: *Well, you're certainly not a clone.*

BILL: No, but people still remark, make occasional remarks, from some dark cave someplace — people that have obviously not been watching my work. *(Laughter.)* But I think that's probably why I got a lot of flak. In a way I think it's water under the bridge at this point, because I feel that I learned a great deal about art and drawing, and basically, Neal's stuff got me through a lot of rough times. As obsessive as I got about it, it really was a lot for me to hold onto. It really was a focus for me during some pretty rough times as a kid. After I let it go — which is really a hard thing to do — it's like *trying* to fall asleep or like saying you're going to have a good time now, damn it!, and consciously setting out to do it. Simply letting go is not as easy as it sounds — so when I did start to let go of it more I went gangbusters. I felt there was a whole world out there. I was basically a whore — I was sleeping around with every style there was, and loving it! *(Laughter.)* It was all out there. Basically, what I wanted to do was, say, "Look, this is what comics can be!" What's happening now, at least with what Frank and I are doing, **Alan Moore** to a certain extent, is we're taking the way we view the world and bringing that to the medium. Back when comics first started out they were basically done by a lot of Jewish artists — almost like psychotherapy, like art therapy — as a way of dealing with Nazis and feelings of powerlessness. It was also very heavily political, which is the way comics should go — subversion — underground. They should *not* be main stream, it kills their effectiveness. I think that our culture right now is ready for a major comic-book event, in terms of punk politics and along the lines of what happened with French films in a way, and that kind of popularity.

LYRICAL WAITRESS: Is everything alright here?

BILL: Nah. A real bitch. The Jag blew a rod and the Rolls has a *pate* stain on the fur carpet. But comics are improving.

DWIGHT: *Fine.*

BILL: I think that's sort of what's happening.

DWIGHT: *So you think that comics are poised on the brink of breaking out of their traditional markets? Or the traditional area that has kept them fenced in?*

BILL: I don't think they're all going to break out of it. Some will break out (like DARK KNIGHT) and some will always be what they're gonna be. I mean, let's face it, in a lot of ways they're popular culture, and there are people that have a major investment in keeping comics the way they are, so they're going to be that for as long as they last. There's also going to be, I hope and I feel and would like to think, an alternative in the sense of awareness by a lot of readers; so that there's going to be more work that's going to be produced like DARK KNIGHT, like **Alan Moore**'s exquisite writing, like ELEKTRA — and also a place for the level of integrity, sophistication and chance-taking that I feel that I want to bring to the art, and creators like **Jay Muth**, **DeMatteis**, and others of their ilk. There's got to be more of an awareness.

DWIGHT: *Getting back to the introduction of your new art style on NEW MUTANTS, did you do samples with that, you know, before getting the assignment?*

BILL: As if to say, "I'm going to do this crazy stuff," and like that? No. I had no idea I was going to go that way. I had no idea. When I did NEW MUTANTS, I guess — the first issue looks fairly representational, not so much of a jump from the last issue of MOON KNIGHT as the last issue of NEW MUTANTS was from the first. There was an incredible jump in there, but it was just the natural progression. Frenetic as it was,..it was part of the influences. I felt like a process of streamlining was taking place. And also the progress of, "Hey, let's just have some fun here!" I think that I'd gone through all of the styles of art — involving **Chuck Jones** and animation. . .I mean, **Peter Sanderson**, who was **Ann Nocenti**'s assistant at the time and I just started having these conversations, and one thing led to another about animation. He turned me on to a lot that I was not aware of with animation. Consequently, we became very good friends — and I think a lot of the NEW MUTANTS work sort of came as a result of those conversations with Peter. "Like, wow, it's fun stuff!" It started to reflect in my work. So **Peter Sanderson** is partially to blame, and partially to credit for what transpired. How is that for passing the buck? Hello, Peter.

DWIGHT: *Did you have any fears of how editors or other professionals, would react to this new style of art that you were hitting them with?*

BILL: I never really thought about catching any flak. I think towards the end the heads started to turn.

DWIGHT: *Towards the end? That's unusual. Usually it'd be in the beginning.*

BILL: Of the series? No. I think what happened was that people anticipated my MOON KNIGHT style, and they got it for an issue or two or three, and then it gradually started to change; and it was basically, "Where's Bill going?" I have to admit that I don't think I could have stayed on it for much longer, anyway. I think I stayed

this crazy stuff with NEW MUTANTS."

on it maybe four or five or six issues longer than I wanted to. And so ultimately what happened was — I got no real flak — things pretty much went without a hitch. I think if I tried to do those issues *now* it'd be a problem. God, it would be shitty hell. So I can't really say that anybody gave me a hard time over it. Even I at one point went, "This is all kinds of neat but let's pull it in a little bit." I felt that (but only for a second).

I think a lot of artists have preconceptions about what comics are and what you can use to do them. I never set out to push it. I never thought, "I want to go nuts with this stuff." I just wanted to work out some stuff that had to come out. To get across the point of the story in the most effective visual way. I think whenever I set out to do anything "crazy" it's like it's straightjacketing right from the beginning because it's a preconception. A lot of stuff that works out the best is when it's just simply what it's going to be. Nobody sets out and says, "I'm gonna do a masterpiece now." It isn't for the artist to judge or prejudge. I just sit down to do a piece of work and if it works out, fine — that's a plus — and if other people attach something to it that's up to them. There are pieces that I've done I want stick my arm down my throat instead of just two fingers! *(Laughter.)* It's like, "My God, how could I do this?" So I never really set out to do anything crazy. It was just simply: "Wouldn't it be fun to try this" or "This seems the best way to do it." But "I'm gonna be intense now!" — it just doesn't wash. You either are or you're not. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *What has been your biggest disappointment in the art that you did for NEW MUTANTS?*

BILL: *(Pause.)* The biggest disappointment? That's a really good question. I suppose the biggest disappointment is also the greatest asset. Partly, it's the polarity. I love the fact that it seemed to add a new dimension or something, a new wrinkle — it was so much fun to do. I feel that as far as a body of work, the twelve or thirteen issues that Chris and I did, I'm very proud of those issues. I feel like in some ways it didn't work out, but in other ways I feel like it was a really nice thing to see; that we were pushing stuff around that way. The biggest disappointment is that I feel like it was left unfinished. I wish it could have been a finite series. A limited run. A set run, like ELEKTRA. It sort of trailed off for me. *Pffft.* That didn't sit well with me. I left in the middle of a three-parter, or the beginning of a three-parter or something like that, "Fat Karma" — and I feel like . . . I could have stayed on it but it's almost like . . . I like there to be a beginning and a middle and an end to something, which is why I like working on ELEKTRA. It's mine and no one comes in after I'm through with the run and fucks with the statement we made.

DWIGHT: *Do you think that style would have been possible, for instance, in 1970 or thereabouts?*

BILL: Absolutely not. The seeds may have been there. It's like RAN. Kurosawa could not have done RAN if he hadn't done everything else before it. Everything in its time. ELEKTRA #1 is ELEKTRA #1 because it was ready to be ELEKTRA #1 — the way it looks, the way it feels, the way it reads. It's not like something that can be done every month the same way. And, if anything, I feel that the work that I do is volatile enough, and I'm changing all the time — so I feel like that's part of why the work is always looking the way that it does. Choosing and discarding.



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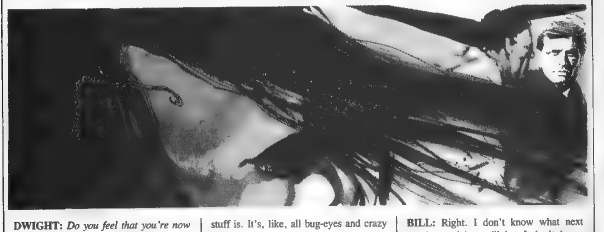
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"I'm a butcher drawing with burnt cork."



DWIGHT: *Do you feel that you're now being typecast with a new identity?*

BILL: Yeah, and it's odd. I am being typecast as being, "The Weird Artist." I don't want to be an adjective. I could do very very traditional work — it just so happens that I have a different drummer that I'm walking to right now. I think people who are typecasting me — I've had several situations where the people have come up to me with scripts and, I've agreed to do them, and they're the most boring pieces of shit. And they say, "Well, we figured *you* could make it interesting." But I guess I choose to take that challenge.

DWIGHT: *Putting the onus on you.*

BILL: Yeah. And I want to also do the really good straight stuff which I'm doing on ELEKTRA: Straight stuff. Weird stuff. Punk stuff. I want to be able to go all across the board. A lot of the primal scream stuff, the real bizarre stuff, was sort of me exorcising a lot of demons on comic-book paper. As I was pushing, the people somehow took notice of it. And people will grab ahold of the very obvious things and they will miss a lot of the subtlety underneath. They'll grab ahold of the biggest sign they can see and they say, "Oh, that's what this stuff is. It's, like, all bug-eyes and crazy things."

DWIGHT: *The people need labels, it seems.*

BILL: Yeah. It doesn't really pan out. It's like the platypus. It is a mammal? Is it a duck? Is it a fish? Mineral? What happens is a lot of people, in order to figure out what it is, rather than just to reclassify it, they cut it apart in different sections and categorize it; the bill goes here, the fur goes here, the webbed feet go here, the tail goes here. And what happens is that they kill it! They dissect it to see what makes it tick and in the process it stops ticking. So people like to label. It's pretty funny. Let them keep guessing. I like keeping them on their toes. I want to be able to do anything. I don't want people to only say, "Well, when we want something artistically nuts we'll come to you." Nuts to them.

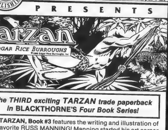
DWIGHT: *Going back to your comment about the bureaucracy that you said ELEKTRA is attacking, it almost sounds like you're attacking the fact that a bureaucracy of sorts is labeling Bill Sienkiewicz the weird artist, and beforehand they labeled him the Neal Adams clone, and maybe next year they'll label him something else...*

BILL: Right. I don't know what next year's moniker will be. I don't know where I'm going to be heading, myself. I've heard all kinds of adjectives. One of the ones I like is innovative. That one is okay. But I also like the ones that say I'm a butcher who draws with a piece of burnt cork. How innovative! *(Laughter.)* People have said that. "It looks like you've drawn this issue with burnt cork," or whatever. Whenever I get letters like that I want to send them thank-you notes 'cause I haven't tried that yet. Because comics are commercial art, I walk a line, partly what I'm bringing to it is personal: what art is to me; it's like the artist's self-discovery, the way he looks at the world. That's sort of like putting a **Frank Stella** piece on a Kellogg's Cornflakes box — it's taking a chance in the sense of being commercial. It just so happens that comics can do that kind of thing, you know — and visually there's a lot more subtext. Frank does stories that deal definitely with the bureaucracy, a lot of stuff that's going on with the world. Everybody. The point is to take that stuff and turn it into entertainment. Luckily enough, people seem to be coming along for the ride.



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"I did SPIDER-MAN, GHOST RIDER, and THOR."



Smilin' Rick in front of two of his favorite subjects — women and cats, here depicted by one of Bryant's major influences, Frank Frazetta.

RICK BRYANT

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Rick Bryant

Residence: Moved from California to New York in 1972.

Born: 4 July 1952 — Clintwood, Virginia

Credits: "My first professional sale was two illustrations used in the first issue of Marvel's UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION. I used to be a background artist until I had a falling out with Joe Rubinstein." Worked as an assistant to just about every big-name inker in the business, except for Terry Austin, including Bob Wiacek, Dick Giordano, Neal Adams, Bob McCleod, Frank Giacoia, Dan Green, et al. During a two year period, did over 40 illustrations, some of which wound up in two portfolios, WINDDREAMS, published by Neal Adams, and DELICATE EMBRACE, published by Pacific. Many illustrations for GALAXY, AMAZING, COSMOS, HEAVY METAL, and numerous commercial illustrations including the licensing guide for the television show V. Inked two installments of "Avalon," a David Campitti/David Ross strip for Pacific. Did a painting of the space shuttle issued by NASA as a limited edition poster. Regular inker for Keith Giffen's work on THE THUNDER AGENTS for Deluxe. inker on FIRST COMICS' THE BADGER.

Favorite Tools: Windsor-Newton Series #2 Sable brush, all pen points, and "a little brush and felt-tip when inking Giffen."

Training: Self-taught, mostly hands-on experience.

Favorite Music: Vangelis, Andreas Wollenweider, Alan Parsons, The Beatles, Cream, Led Zeppelin, Kate Bush

Favorite Authors: Heinlein, Asimov, Larry Niven, Edgar Rice Burroughs

Major Artistic Influences: Frank Frazetta, Neal Adams, Jack Kirby

Major Personal Influences: Keith Giffen and Neal Adams for all the help they've given me.

Favorite Films: SEVEN SAMURAI, CITIZEN KANE, 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, BLADERUNNER, EXCALIBUR, CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, STAR WARS, BRAZIL

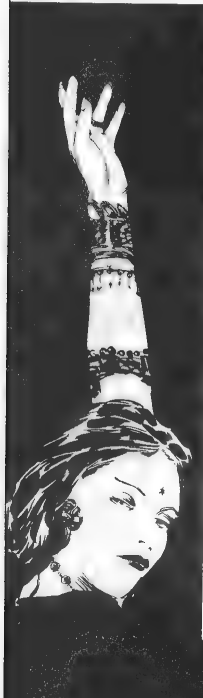
Favorite Artists: Bill Sienkiewicz, Michael Golden, Frank Frazetta, Bob Peake, Barron Storrey

Favorite President: "I don't have one. I know too much about their fallabilities to have one."

Pet Peeve: People who are chronically late.

Most Bizarre Accomplishment: Appeared in NEW YORK NUDE (No, we aren't going to show you the picture.)

"I've done fine art, super-realism, com-



Up until recently, Rick Bryant is one of the best kept secrets in comics. Despite a thirteen year career that included working with almost every top inker in comics, to say nothing of Rick's sterling work as an illustrator and painter, he is unknown to most comics fans. However, this has altered radically with Rick's recent work for First, Deluxe and Sirius Comics. In the meantime, Rick has racked up an impressive list of artistic credits that just keeps growing. Among his personal accomplishments is the creation of his studio. After spending $30,000 equipping it, Rick can tackle any type of commercial art assignment from story boards to comic pages to airbrushed photo-realist paintings. The small, white-walled room is literally crammed to the ceiling with his files, art collection, drawing equipment, science fiction toys, cameras, and enough audio and video gear to gag Crazy Eddie.

But, refreshingly, Rick doesn't stay chained to the drawing board. In person he's affable, opinionated and very social and despite his frequently hectic schedule, he is rarely too busy to share his technical knowledge with fellow artists. He always brings to his work an active imagination, a drive for perfection and a relentless curiousity about the world around him. A final note: this interview was conducted before the recent Space Shuttle disaster.

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *Rick, you hail from where?*

RICK BRYANT: From a coal mining town in Clintwood, Virginia — Dickenson County, near the Kentucky-Tennessee border. If it wasn't for my father getting the hell out of there, I'd be there still digging coal. My grandmother had nineteen kids. My father was one of thirteen, so there's a lot of that going on back there. Most of them are still back there. Hard to believe — behind me could be a mountain of coal right now.

STEVE: *Did you grow up there?*

RICK: I spent my first three years there We always spent three months out of the year there during the summers. We'd get somewhere and stay a month. Then my dad didn't want to live there. We'd move somewhere else. I've been all over the U.S. by car. I grew up in the back seat of a car.

STEVE: *Where'd you finally settle?*

RICK: Santa Cruz, California. It was April of 1972 when I left there for New York City. I never went back. I love California. The weather, the people are nicer than on the East coast. But there's one thing missing: culture. I need impetus from movies, television, books, stores, museums. I can't stand it if it's not available to me.

STEVE: *How long have you been drawing?*

RICK: I've been doodling since I was two, but I've been really trying to work at it since I was nineteen.

STEVE: *How did you get into comics?*

RICK: Like a lot of other people, I had probably the biggest and best comic collection in all of California. I had two sets of everything ever published relating to comic books and science fiction. I thought, "Gee, I don't want to be a collector, I want to be an artist, and I can't be both!" So, I sold them all for a penny a piece and got to New York — I did it all in two days. If I had waited six months, I could have gotten a hell of a lot more for them. If I still had it, it'd be worth three hundred thousand dollars, easy. But I had to sell because I couldn't get anyone to back me, including my own family.

STEVE: *Families can be very un-understanding about people who want to start in comics.*

RICK: That's reality. That goes back to the caveman. "You want to go out on your own? I ain't helping you." Nothing's changed. I realized that fast and thought, "I could live without comics, I want to be an artist!" I got a job at DC on staff. I wound up bossing a lot of other people around at eighteen. I knew less than they did. I learned fast and I had a way of standing up for myself. I

© 1986 Rick Bryant

mercial illustration, animal painting."

was there for a year and a half and said, "I've had enough of this." I quit and walked the streets until I got some freelance production work. I got into science fiction and out of comics — now I'm doing both. It was a long, circuitous route. I didn't like it and I wish there were other ways. Money could have gotten me a lot of things very fast, but I made it anyway.

STEVE: *When did you first go professional?*

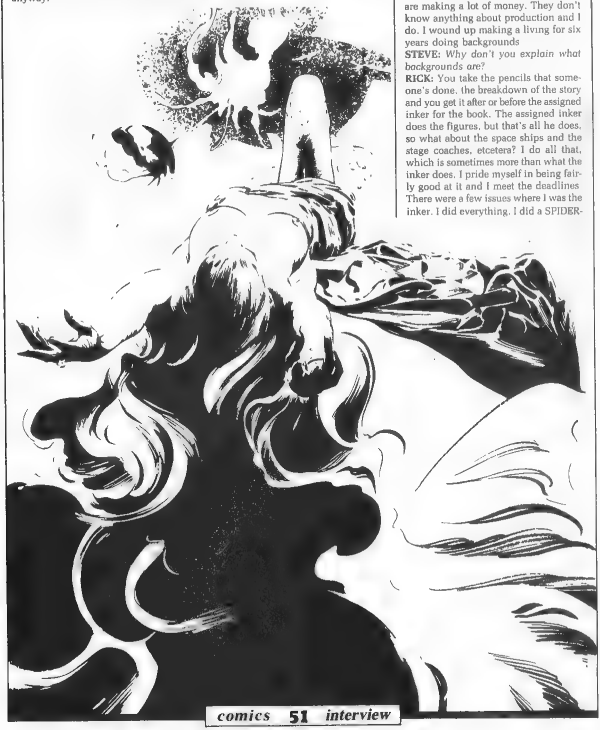
RICK: Let's see. That was 1974. It was my first sale to Marvel Comics. UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION — it was two space drawings for their new magazine. **Roy Thomas** gave me my first break.

STEVE: *How did you learn to be a professional artist?*

RICK: I had no backing and no family with money to go to school, so I came to New York and watched other people draw. I hung around the studios a lot until they kicked me out. Working at DC got me a lot of valuable information that a lot of other artists still don't have, who have been in the business ten years and are making a lot of money. They don't know anything about production and I do. I wound up making a living for six years doing backgrounds

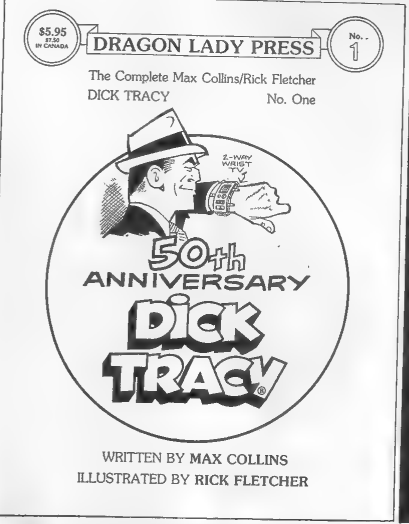
STEVE: *Why don't you explain what backgrounds are?*

RICK: You take the pencils that someone's done, the breakdown of the story and you get it after or before the assigned inker for the book. The assigned inker does the figures, but that's all he does, so what about the space ships and the stage coaches, etcetera? I do all that, which is sometimes more than what the inker does. I pride myself in being fairly good at it and I meet the deadlines There were a few issues where I was the inker. I did everything. I did a SPIDER-



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"I was in the press at the Shuttle launch."

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WOMAN, a GHOST RIDER, and five pages on THOR. I wasn't happy with it, but everybody else was.

STEVE: *How important do you feel training is?*

RICK: It's the only way to go if you can find the right place to study, the right people to study under. The problem, here in America, is it's a very limited thing to find.

STEVE: *Are you speaking specifically of illustration?*

RICK: Art schools, yes. Art school or fine arts. If you can get proper training, it's invaluable. Finding out about it, being able to afford it, finding the right people and the right schools; that's the hard part.

STEVE: *It's obvious from a lot of your work that you're more interested in science fiction than fantasy.*

RICK: That's where I started out. I wanted to be an astronaut and a scientist when I was a kid. The fact that I got sidetracked into art was just my way of manifesting those feelings. I wanted to be in science fiction art, but I wound up getting sidetracked. Now I do a little bit of everything, but I do concentrate a lot on the science fiction and technical illustration of science.

STEVE: *How many styles do you have?*

RICK: You name it. I've done a little bit of everything, from fine art, superrealism, commercial illustration and technical illustration to dolphins, animal painting, portraiture, life drawings, nudes. I do a little bit of everything. It's one of the strengths I have as an artist, and also one of the weaknesses. I don't specialize and no one can really pinpoint me when they give me work or to say, "Hey, that's who he is."

STEVE: *Kaluta has the same problem — he's got twelve different styles.*

RICK: I don't know about twelve different styles. I know he is definitely in one field — fantasy and comics — so he can be pinpointed to that

STEVE: *But art directors look at his work and they just say "Oh, he can draw '30s and he can draw pulp-type illustrations."*

RICK: And Fantasies. Right. Style is the subject matter.

STEVE: *Right. He doesn't stick to one subject matter. Neither do you.*

RICK: No. I get bored very fast, sticking to one thing. I may go back to it, but one day I want to do spaceships, the next day I want to do people, the next day I want to do an animal painting, and the next day I want to do a fantasy piece. Whatever hits my fancy.

STEVE: *What's more important to you in a drawing — style or content?*

RICK: Style. Content almost doesn't interest me half the time, because style says it all in a lot of my work.



Michael Hernandez pencilled and Rick inked this intriguing figure.

STEVE: *If you had total freedom to draw anything, if you didn't have to worry about money, paying the rent, if you could just draw, what would that be?*

RICK: I would probably sit down at this point and do a lot of space-shuttle and NASA type work. In between that I would do a lot of drawing of people and anatomy

STEVE: *Do you ever work with live models?*

RICK: Lots.

STEVE: *Where do you get the models?*

RICK: All over the place. I just ask.

STEVE: *Yes, so you obviously have an eye for the ladies!*

RICK: In my own way, yeah. *(Laughter.)*

STEVE: *Rick, you attended the shuttle launch. What was that like?*

RICK: It was tremendous. I was as close as you could get to it — being in the press site. It was just personnel and the press that had to be there. So there was a lot more room and there were people you could talk to knowledgeably about what was going on. I spent four days there, hanging out, talking to people, picking up information and making contacts, and then stayed up twenty-four hours 'til the launch morning.

STEVE: *Were you pretty keyed up?*

RICK: Extremely keyed up. Also dead tired. I had my camera set up and watched the launch. It was really quite

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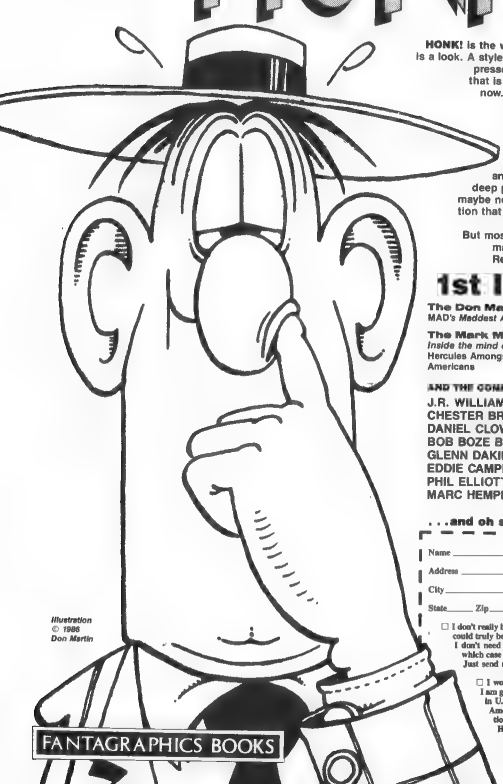


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"I grew up in the back seat of a car."

amazing — my first one. All my life I've been thinking of astronauts and space and doing comics and science fiction. I never saw a launch of any sort. This was a very big thing for me.

STEVE: *What was the actual launch like?*

RICK: Well, it was loud. It was kind of a thrill because everybody kept saying there would be a shock wave. When it did finally happen, there was a delayed reaction because of the two mile distance. You felt your clothes flapping and rumbling on your body. You could feel it in your gut because of the vibrations from the engines and the roar. Then came the boom, the sonic boom. Then you could see the lift-off. And it just was, like, going up so slow and then gaining speed and taking off. There was some cloud coverage, but not where the launch was, at the low end. So you could see the whole takeoff. It went through a couple cloud layers and you could see it again. Then it went through another one and then you could see it again. So, it wasn't a clear day, but I had a good zoom lens. I got to see the whole thing through the lens. The vapor trail afterwards was just beautiful, a plume of vapors and gas

STEVE: *Would you say the launch itself was the most impressive thing you saw? I'm sure that going up and seeing the shuttle and the area where they refurbish it, I don't know what they call that...*

RICK: The VAB?

STEVE: *The VAB, yeah. Just going to see that must be pretty awsome because it's so huge.*

RICK: It is, and I got to go up within a few hundred yards of the launch site itself.

STEVE: *While the shuttle was on the tower?*

RICK: Yeah. It was pretty majestic. I've never seen anything like that before. I was pretty thrilled.

STEVE: *How did it compare to some of the science fiction movies that you've seen. like 2001, in terms of the impressions you get?*

RICK: Actually, I got a lot of the same feelings, because my mind is clouded by the information of what this means to society, and the human race, and what it means for this ship to actually have been built and put there. All the information, and knowledge, and work, and money that was put behind it. I'm aware of all that while I'm sitting there looking at it It just colors my feelings about it — in the positive sense, maybe overly so, but I don't mind being overly so.

STEVE: *I think it will be a positive thing for all mankind.*

RICK: I feel it is *right now*, not *will be*, but *is*. Very few people know it, though

STEVE: *The benefits will far outweigh the costs in the future.*

RICK: In the future it will, but it is already doing that now. But very few people really are aware of it. I mean, NASA publishes a yearly book — magazine — called SPINOFFS. It is nothing but chock full of what NASA has invented or developed that has been turned into commercial applications. You'd be surprised. The world today is what it is because of NASA, not because of anything else — but NASA. Without NASA, we wouldn't have what we've got now. It's affecting us right now. But 90% of the world doesn't know it. They don't care, in fact. And the entire NASA budget is one day's spending on the Vietnam War. When you think about it, it's nothing. We'd be colonizing Saturn by now if we took the money from the entire Vietnam War and put it into the shuttle system.

STEVE: *Are you a little disturbed, like I am, about the military applications of the shuttle?*

RICK: No, I'm not disturbed by it. As much as I'm against war, and I love pacifism and the grandeur of the human race and love...

STEVE: *All that liberal bullshit?*

RICK: It's what it is: bullshit. Because, our next door neighbor is Russia, and I'm not blind and I'm not asleep at the wheel. They are not playing games. We have no choice. I wish we did. We have no choice. We *need* a military, we need a military budget, we need laser cannons, we need fusion blasters — we



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"I have fear of the Russians, and China."



need every dirty trick in the book, just to stay even.

STEVE: *Do you think they're totally ruthless — that there is no compromise?*

RICK: I don't *think* it. I *know* it. They have said so on television. They're not hiding the fact. They know how to play the game and win. And they are. And I don't trust them because of that. So when they finally decide to give up and just leave us alone, we'll leave them alone. Sure, I don't see why we have to spend money anywhere except where it should do good, like NASA. NASA is everything to me. I believe it's the salvation of the entire human — everything! But it won't be until there's no more war. And that won't be until Russia quits trying to take over both hemispheres.

STEVE: *Well, there've been wars throughout history.*

RICK: And I don't think that'll ever change — even when we get into space. If, God forbid, the human race decided to call it quits and say, "Hey, everybody loves everybody." — that's the day we're going to wake up and there's going to be something from out there saying, "Hey, you're next on our list." It does not end. It's part of what I consider the reality of space, of history, of civilization. There's always something around the corner. For those who say, "Okay, everything's peace, love and understanding" — they're the ones who, when they wake up the next day — are somebody's slave. I do not believe in turning my cheek to anybody. I'm willing to take part of my wages, part of my experience, half of what I do and want to do, and put it towards peace. I will never throw the *other* half into that ballpark. I have no faith in the human race in terms of not having to watch my back. I know that's not true, that's not real. So, I have fear of the Russians, and China. Who knows anywhere else? Cuba? Cuba's a little country, but someday it could be big. It's certainly on its way. I believe in the space shuttle and its military applications, but I want it to be a *part* of it. I don't want the military to take over the whole thing. That would be a crime. You can't do too much of anything.

STEVE: *You've got to be balanced.*

RICK: Because you're losing the other half somewhere; on the other hand, there's gotta be a balance.

STEVE: *How close do you think we are to building a viable space station?*

RICK: It's viable right now.

STEVE: *How soon do you think they'll do it?*

RICK: Ten, twenty years.

STEVE: *Why is NASA waiting so long?*

RICK: If NASA had its way, we would have been up there ten years ago! We're talking about government and money, nothing else. *Nothing else!*

STEVE: *Well, the Russians have kept a space station in continuous orbit for a few years.*

RICK: They've got more than that in orbit. They mean business. They're willing to play dirty and they're succeeding. Their technology is nowhere near ours, but they're pumping money into it. They're going at it with a train of thought — which is direct. They are going directly towards beating us in every way. It doesn't matter if it's done slipshod — they are getting people up there and objects up there. That's their end goal. And once they've got it, they've got us. They're years ahead in some of their technology, even if it is crude. But crude technology is better than no technology.

We're dealing with leaders that know absolutely beans. They've got the I.Q.s of ants. And that's my opinion of the political leaders and Congressmen. I have

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"I worked on the X-MEN graphic novel."

little faith or no faith in politicians when it comes to that.

STEVE: *I think that you have that in common with most of the people in this country.*

RICK: Yes. If I had my way I'd get rid of them.

STEVE: *I think they're a bunch of leaches — sponging off the rest of us.*

RICK: Oh, absolutely. I hope I never become friends with someone who goes into politics, because I do not trust them, not one person. It's a filthy profession to get into.

STEVE: *What have you done for NASA so far?*

RICK: I haven't done anything for NASA so far. How this got started was that I had some spare time and I did an an acrylic painting of the space shuttle with a gaseous nebula behind it. I got enough reaction to that so that I sent slides of it off to different NASA people and NASA industries and I got a lot of response. I called up NASA and asked if I couldn't go to the next space launch and they said, "Yes" — based on having seen one slide. My intent was to get enough photo reference and enough feel for what was going on, to come back home and do a series of black-and-white and-color illustrations and paintings, and then have a portfolio, posters, illustrate articles. That's my goal. I'm thrilled about having gone. Because this is my contribution, my way of being an astronaut.

STEVE: *What do you think you'll do for NASA in the future, now that you have seen the launch?*

RICK: I've got a contract that wants me to do one of the shirts. I may have some shuttle shirts coming out. I just got a call that a first space shuttle painting, in acrylic, is being done as a limited poster, 500 copies, full-color. It's going to be sold through NASA giftshop outlets and through conventions.

STEVE: *If they offered you a ride on the next trip, how long would it take you to pack?*

RICK: About five minutes. Yes, I would go. Absolutely. I hope to be around then they are offering some kind of deal to get up into space, even if it's just a fifteen-minute ride up there and being weightless and looking on the Earth. I plan on going. I'm going to be one of those special few selected, I plan on it.

STEVE: *Let's get away from space and get back to something more prosaic. Where has your work appeared?*

RICK: ANALOG, AMAZING, HEAVY METAL, UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION for Marvel. I've done some work through Neal's studio for backgrounds for television commercials — Animatics. I've had illo work all over the place, not just the science-fiction magazines, but in fantasy.

STEVE: *Is it true that you helped Bob Wiacek with the X-MEN?*

RICK: Yes, he called me up and asked me if I could help him out on backgrounds and Zip-A-Toning. I said yes. I've worked on the **Sienkiewicz** DRACULA issue. I did some work on the **Brent Anderson** X-MEN graphic novel. Beautiful. It's wonderful. **Wiacek** did a great job.

STEVE: *Were you inking over his pencils?*

RICK: Just backgrounds. It's as a favor to him. It's easy money for me. I also did some backgrounds for **John Buscema** on the CONAN movie adaptation for Marvel. I did about twenty pages of backgrounds.

STEVE: *What would you like to illustrate that an art director wouldn't ordinarily assume you'd be interested in?*

RICK: Work at drawing people, nude and clothed, in different settings and poses.

STEVE: *Is that why you allowed yourself to be photographed for NEW YORK NUDE? Or was that just a goof?*

RICK: That was almost a goof. I had seen the show at Nikon House about three years ago. The photographer had a note on the board and so I wrote him. When he moved to New York, he called me. I went back for three different photo sessions, about 700 photos were taken, and I had a great time. It was like acting and posing and being an artist myself in front of the camera. He had a good feeling about the whole session and so did I. I liked what happened with it. I wasn't embarrassed by it, I thought it was something fun to do.

STEVE: *Did you like the picture he eventually chose?*

RICK: Yeah, but there were so many others that were good also — that's the problem with two pages.

STEVE: *What about the video game backgrounds that you've done?*

RICK: I met a person who works for



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"I'd gotten knifed in Manhattan."



Craig (AQUAMAN) Hamilton penciilled and Rick inked this eerie version of DC's Creeper.

Cinema/Graphics out in San Diego at a convention. Through him, I wound up working for the company, doing arcade game art for their machines. I did TAILGUNNER, ARMOR ATTACK, STARCASTLE and WAR OF THE WORLDS. They just felt that there were too many bugs in that one so they didn't spend the time to iron it out. They commissioned me to do the painting, graphics, and they bought it, paid for it and then didn't use it. So, I still have the painting rights to sell. No one's seen it. That was one of the best jobs I ever did, a whole airbrush of a tripod — a B-1 Bomber in the background. It was acrylic for the paintings, zipatone and black-and-white ink for the rest of the graphics. They put the color on at the plant.

STEVE: *What advice do you have for 'aspiring artists?*

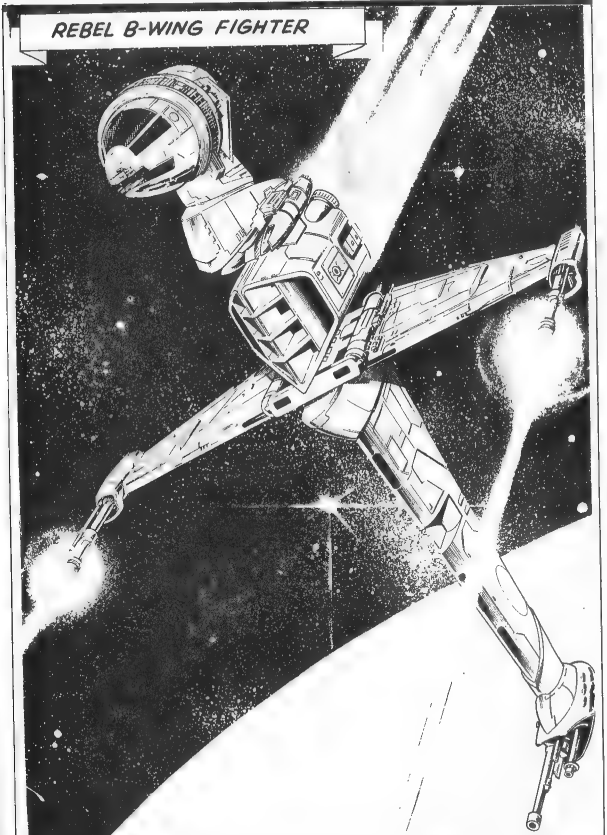
RICK: I'd sit them down and yell at them. I spend my time with them and have re-done more students' paintings just for the fun of it hoping that maybe they'll learn something. I tell them to join the Graphic Artists Guild and to write the Copyright Office for free copyright packages. I advise them to look up people they admire in the phone book. Call them up, ask them questions, look at their work. The worst they can do is say, "No."

STEVE: *You've come a long way lately.*

RICK: Well, let's see, I guess it would be mainly what's happened in terms of inking work. I had basically gotten ready to leave the industry, to go into the commercial field and private publishing of my work and about two weeks after I had made that decision, I started getting phone calls from **Keith Giffen**, to do a fill-in on NEXUS with him, inking that, and doing some work over at Deluxe on Lightning, and for some reason, that got a good reception, mostly from the companies, besides Keith liking the work, and that followed up with a phone call from three people from First Comics going, "Gee, are you available?' And it's like, my response was: "I've been available ever since I came to New York. What made you decide to call me now instead of two years ago? Okay, I'm glad you called. What's up?" "Well, we want you to ink THE BADGER." I was shocked. I couldn't believe it. I followed up with a project that was mentioned by **Campiti** and **Juan Collado** from Sirius Comics at the last San Diego Con. We went out to a business lunch there and they showed me a number of jobs and I said I would like to ink any of these people and my schedule was open. And what came out of that was working with **Bart Sears**, a new kid who was phenomenal, probably one of the biggest new talents to hit the market and basically nobody knows he exists yet. But he will be known. And so we wound up doing HERO ALLIANCE for Sirus and the response — from distributors and publishers and other artists and people in the business, from seeing the originals or xeroxes of the originals and any work that's been done so far — has been just one rave after another. So, they've offered him a lot of other work and I've gotten a lot of other work based upon what they've seen of me inking him. And every artist I ink, it looks like a different inker. If you had looked at the **Keith Giffen** stuff, you would never know to hire **Rick Bryant** to ink **Bart Sears**, or seeing the **Bart Sears** stuff, you'd never hire me to ink THE BADGER and that goes on and on. Now that was followed up with an offer to ink **Craig Hamilton** based on samples I'd inked of his, for the fun of it. And so

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"Our leaders have the IQ's of ants."





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"I was *persona non grata* — blacklisted."



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we're doing a Greek God portfolio that **Craig Hamilton** pencilled and I inked... that should be out in a month and a half or two months, published by **Sal Quartuccio**. And we're at work now on a CONAN portfolio, with Craig pencilling and me inking.

Plus, I'm inking a ten-page Storm job by Craig for MARVEL FANFARE.

STEVE: *How did you originally meet Craig Hamilton?*

RICK: At a convention, before he got started. I was one of the first people to see his samples. And I just said: "Within six months to a year, you're going to be a very big name in the business." And sure enough, he was. It was obvious, looking at his work.

STEVE: *How did you know Keith Giffen?*

RICK: I had worked on some of **Giffen**'s work when I was first in the industry, working freelance in the early '70s. I Zip-Toned a job of his that was being reprinted. It was a space job, space warfare and all that. And then, all of a sudden, I would meet him every once in a while up at the halls at DC. It was cordial, you know, but we didn't really talk that much. But, we started meeting more and more, got more in contact. And he kind of heard that I couldn't get a shot to save my life anywhere. I mean, it's just there was no work to be given to **Rick Bryant**. It didn't matter whether I was a good inker or not, or whether they liked me or not. I was just *persona non grata*, or blacklisted, you name it, and he decided that that was bullshit and there was no reason for it, especially when he knew what a lot of other people were doing in this business and getting away with, whether you liked them or not. So, he started pushing me to be inking him. Marvel and DC said: "No." for one reason or another, which I'm not privy to. But, when he got offered a job at Deluxe, I started inking a Menthor job and then, every Lightning installment in the Deluxe T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS, and from that I got a NEXUS fill-in with Keith when he went to First and that's how I got in at First since they didn't know I was available.

STEVE: *So, at the present time, your work is coming out from four different companies?*

RICK: Yeah, it's all happening right now. And I'm working for more companies than that, technically speaking... I've got a couple of private backers for some portfolios and posters, and I've got a pencil poster I did about six years ago. I had gotten knifed in Manhattan and I had all my work stolen, and I decided, well, I either get out of the business and k.ve the city and stay alive or stay in the city and fight and do something new. So, I started a pencil poster. And that, believe it or not, is what's going to be used. It's ala **Barry Smith**, **Kaluta**, **Wrightson**, **Jones**, **Frazetta**, **Mucha**. It was a change of direction. **Mitch Itkowitz** is going to be publishing it as a limited edition poster.

STEVE: *Didn't you also recently ink a 3-D comic?*

RICK: Well, that was for Sirius also... BLACKSHARD 3-D, and I inked about a quarter of it, then I got sick, and on top of that I got swamped with other deadlines, and it all fell on me at a very bad time. I had this flu twice in two months and for a total of six weeks I was knocked out. So, it put me so far behind schedule that I got a number of other artists to help me do a panel here, a head and arm there, and when it was about two thirds done, I got sick, couldn't finish it, and **Dave Campiti** had to have two other people finish it. So, I don't really consider my having inked that, but I helped on it. I was really upset that I couldn't finish it, because I could have done a beautiful job and had started doing a beautiful job and I would like to work with **Glenn Johnson** again on another job.

STEVE: *Rick. It sounds like you're more in demand now then you ever have been.*

RICK: Yeah, and I'm not sure I understand why, but I'm happy, and financially solvent and I've got some real estate in mind and traveling and moving.

STEVE: *Are you planning to stay in the city?*

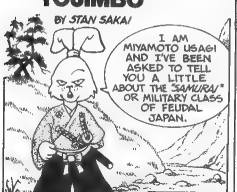
RICK: Umm, maybe. I've got some ideas and some connections about getting a house and some property out in Pennsylvania or Connecticut. I don't know. I probably will keep my apartment in Manhattan, if possible, and commute back and forth, but I'm not sure. I want a house with some property and a car in the garage. I'm a California kid. I've been here since '72, but I've never let the city infect me, as far as I'm concerned. If anything, I'll infect it.

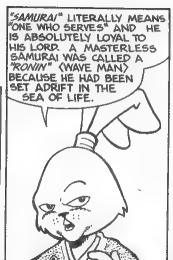


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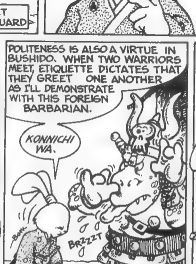
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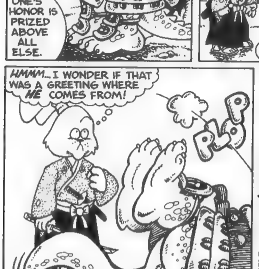














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LAST WORD

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HANDS ACROSS THE WATER

Dear Dave,

Thanks for the last few years worth of COMICS INTERVIEW. So far I have managed to get all the issues in England, but as of #24 I missed an issue and only just managed to find #25. Poor old **John Byrne**, no sooner does he say "...I cannot currently conceive of a time when I won't be doing the FANTASTIC FOUR," than it is announced almost simultaneously he is leaving the book — that must have been the something "really unexpected" happening.

As for the 30 pages of **John Byrne** art, I'm afraid that that is something that I hope you will not do again. That is not what this magazine is all about or what I buy it for; the space should have been devoted to another interview. Well, after issue #25, the next issue I saw was #27 — so I have now missed two issues. This cannot continue! Despite being extremely fussy about the condition of the comics and fanzines I buy, I'd rather risk a damaged copy than no copy at all, so I enclose $36 for a subscription. The extra $6 is for issues #24 and #26 which, as mentioned, I missed.

Scott Manning
32 Cholmeley Park
Highgate
London N6 5XL
England

Your devotion to COMICS INTERVIEW is heartily appreciated, Scott, and



you can be sure we'll strive to maintain the magazine in the style to which you've become accustomed!

— DAK

SUPERMAN MORE "REAL" THAN BATMAN — NOT LESS!

Dear David,

You were indeed correct, David, in saying that #31 was a fine issue — perhaps the best issue of COMICS INTERVIEW yet. (In fact, with the new **Byrne** SUPERMAN just over the horizon, it would be a great idea to put together a similar package on the Man of Steel -- a look at his origins and at new interpretations of the classic figure.)

As naive children and as idealistic (naive?) adults, a lot of us comics fans like to think that it is all sweetness and light behind the scenes in comics. Even more, we like to think that great, classic comics concepts are the result of some pure and wonderful process in which the creators rise above everyday considerations to co-operate in a spirit befitting the occasion. Naturally, this is not always (if ever) true. But still, we like to *think* it is and thus the interview with **Fred Finger** — and, to a lesser extent, with **Bob Kane** and **Jerry Robinson** — made for some disturbing reading. Still, it is important to try to set the record straight and thus pieces like this are well worthwhile.

It is interesting, of course, that even after hearing the words of the above gentlemen, we're not sure what the "straight record" is! Being human, we do not all have the same memories of the same events. Also, events may not have single, precise causes, so participants may be recalling different facets that only *seem* to contradict one another — though placing them on a compatible framework may be a difficult task. Again, we like to believe that the really



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great ideas come in a brief, all-encompassing flash. But the fact that the concept only arrives and composes gradually makes the determination of cause and effect even more difficult.

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The key to the explanation for this is that Batman "earned" his powers (and his abilities are enough above the norm to *seem* like super-powers) — by training and hard work — while Superman was "given" his powers (by his place of birth). (Incidentally, the fascination of Superman is what he does with those supreme powers that he so easily gained.) I knew that there was no way in the world that I could study and train to be the greatest detective/crime fighter in the world. If I wasn't the best hockey player on my street, how could I imagine being the greatest "athlete" in the entire world? But being granted great powers by some twist of fate, ah, *that* was more *imaginable* for me! I didn't have any idea how to go about becoming, say, an expert in fingerprints, but I *did* know what I would do with superstrength or microscopic vision! Perhaps this feeling was due to the fact that Batman was only a "slight" modification to the real world, so the flaws and difficulties could be easily seen, whereas Superman was a complete break with everyday experience and thus the obstacles seemed less real. Of course, I never actually *believed* I could be Superman; I'm just saying I could *imagine* it more readily, and thus the character seemed more "real" (or identifiable) to me.

I guess this just goes to show, again, that different people have different ways of looking at things!

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